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THE PROGRESS OF REVELATION



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THE PROGRESS OF REVELATION

Sermons

Chiefly on the Old Testament

BY THE

REV. G. A. COOKE, D.D.

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Ἐξελεύσεται ὕδωρ ζῶν ἐξ Ἱερουσαλήμ.—ZECH. xiv. 8.

PREFACE.

THIS volume contains sermons preached in Oxford, Rochester, Edinburgh, Dalkeith, and elsewhere. A certain uniformity may be said to run through the collection, in so far as it illustrates the various ways in which we may connect the Old Testament with the New, and, without assuming any mechanical theory, find evidence of a continuous expansion in the progress of revelation. Sometimes I have tried to preach about a whole book instead of a single text. The experiment has its disadvantages, for one may be tempted to make the subject appear simpler than it really is; on the other hand, our teaching in church, if it is to make any impression, must follow broad lines; the preacher cannot hope to do more than bring out the essential points. The sermons here offered to the reader are not lectures—No. XX. is an exception; they do not profess to be exhaustive treatises; they were delivered with the object of commending the Faith and opening some of the treasures of the Bible to the congregation in church. The trained student will not find anything here which he does not know already.

Each age must interpret the Faith, and the documents of the Faith, by the best light which it possesses, and in such a manner as to meet the needs of the day. We who believe in the action of the Holy Spirit within the Church can take up the task with humble dependence upon His aid, but without misgiving. The present generation is called upon to study the Bible in a new light; the results of literary and historical criticism, discoveries in archæology and comparative religion, have opened out to us an interpretation which is none the less true because it may be unexpected and unfamiliar. But the Christian preacher, charged with the cure of souls, knows that the pulpit is not the place for controversial discussions or for heedless adventures into regions which have not been thoroughly explored. In the pulpit he is the pastor, not the critic. He will not obtrude his critical views, but they will colour all he says; his teaching will be based upon them; he will deliver his message with the greater force for having tried to be loyal to the truth so far as he knows it. Such, at any rate, is the method followed by the preacher of these sermons.

Perhaps I ought to have dealt directly with a question which is likely enough to rise in the reader's mind: What, then, are we to think about the inspiration of Holy Scripture? No formulated theory will be discovered in the volume; but I have tried, very feebly as it seems to me now that these sermons appear in print, to show how the higher faith and

teaching of the Old Testament travel forwards to meet the truth proclaimed by Christ and His Apostles, the truth which in all essentials has been preserved and handed down by the Christian Church. The waters which issue out of the sanctuary of the ancient faith find their way into the river which flows through the central street of the New Jerusalem. And this constitutes the surest proof that the Scriptures as a whole are more than human records of man's religious struggles and failures and aspirations; a divine element appears in them; they came from God because they lead to God.

I have to thank the editors of *The Guardian*, *The Expositor*, *The Scottish Guardian*, for permission to reprint Nos. I., VI., XV., XVII., XX.

G. A. COOKE.

THE PRECINCT, ROCHESTER,

September 1910.

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I.
REVELATION.

“In Thy light do we see light.”—Ps. xxxvi. 9.

I.

REVELATION.

IN the order of the Bible as we have it the first spoken word of God is, "Let there be light." Who heard God utter it? Only the formless, empty mass of chaos; but the mind of man, vast ages later, meditating on the mystery of creation, instinctively dramatized his thought, and imagined the primæval relation between God and the Universe as expressed in an almighty word, uttered and obeyed. Then, inasmuch as the work of God in nature is all of a piece with the work of God in grace, continuous, unbroken, we arrive at the climax of the process: "God that said, Light shall shine out of darkness, shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God as it shines in the face of Jesus Christ."¹ Between the first "Let there be light" and this last there lies the eventful record of man's advance in the knowledge of God and of God's disclosure of Himself.

We have been taught to apply to this record a method which students of theology have thankfully learned from students of physical nature, and to

¹ 2 Cor. iv. 6.

trace in the Bible the law of growth at work, the law of orderly development. For example, we can follow, stage by stage, the rise of the belief in the sole Godhead of Jehovah, from the days when He was regarded as a tribal Deity, limited in His influence to the country of the Hebrew tribes, one among the gods of Palestine, up to the time when the law-giver could formulate the crowning article of the Jewish creed, "Jehovah is our God, Jehovah is one," and the prophet could announce the sovereign truth, "I am Jehovah, and there is none else; beside Me is no godhead at all."¹

Then again we have come to recognize the human element in the Bible. Judged as literature by the ordinary canons of criticism which we apply to ancient writings, we find that sayings and discourses are strongly coloured by the individuality of the writer; that in many cases the history of the past has been idealized by later theory; that the writers themselves are not free from imperfections, and even from errors as to matters of fact. We emphasize the historical character of the revelation, and mark the significant connexion between victories in battle, the founding of the kingship, the fall of Jerusalem, the exile in Babylon, the dispersion throughout the Greek kingdoms, and the development of religious ideas.

These methods of study have lit up the dark places and opened the secret ones; the Bible has gained a new interest as it has become more intelli-

¹ Deut. vi. 4; Isa. xlv. 5.

gible: and, further, we are beginning to find that the Bible cannot be understood in its full meaning apart from other documents of ancient religion. The history of Israel was no more an isolated episode in the history of the human race than the faith of Israel stood apart from the faith of other nations. In fact it is becoming clear that the Bible enshrines in their loftiest, purest, truest forms certain hopes and beliefs which lie "deep in the general heart of men," immemorial in their age and universal in their range: the belief, for instance, in the certain victory of good over evil, the longing for a divine Redeemer, the expectation of a God made man in order to accomplish man's deliverance. So we bring to bear our fruitful theories of development, of historical criticism, of comparative religion. We look out for the orderly working of laws, and almost unconsciously we resent the intrusion of anything which seems to conflict with them. We are grown accustomed to study the narratives as human documents from the purely human side; the supernatural element instinctively we dislike or try to explain away. In particular, the notion of a communication from God to man, a direct, external revelation, a divine word uttered and heard, we find to be disturbing; we are tempted to discover some way out of accepting it as a literal fact. We would much rather think of man's discovery than of God's revelation.

Now what has the Bible itself to say about this? It must be admitted that the Bible nowhere suggests

that man can arrive at the knowledge of God by reflection; we are not allowed to imagine that Moses or Samuel or Isaiah acquired their knowledge of the divine will, or learned the message which they delivered, by any process of reasoning or by any insight of their own. God appeared to them, and they saw; God spoke to them, and they listened. Let us take a few instances. We are told that "the word of the Lord came unto Abram in a vision, saying, Fear not, Abram; I am thy shield; thy reward shall be exceeding great"; and "in that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, Unto thy seed I have given this land."¹ How are we to interpret this? Are we to believe that God did actually and literally address these words to Abram? Now in the story of Abram we are in the region not of history but of national legend. Behind the legend there may well be a background of historical fact; but the Abram of the Book of Genesis is the idealized ancestor of the race, a personification of all that was most typical of the national character and religion. Here, then, we have the nation in its representative, the nation, observe, trained by God's providence and possessed of the knowledge of God, unconsciously picturing itself in its ancestor. Israel, populous and settled on its territory, would readily imagine that what was true of the present had been secure from the beginning; so tradition took the shape of a promise and a covenant pledged by God in the far-

¹ Gen. xv. 1, 8.

away days of Abram; his descendants should be innumerable, and they should possess the land of Canaan. Thus all we can say about the revelation made by God to Abram is that it belongs to the sphere of legend. The case is different, I venture to think, when we come to Moses. We have not left the region of legend, but we tread the borderland of history. We are told that "the angel of the Lord appeared unto Moses in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush."¹ The angel, however, is none other than Jehovah Himself, who presently reveals His sublime, mysterious Name, "I will be what I will be." Here, if anywhere, we seem to have an instance of a direct personal revelation of God to man. How are we to interpret it? Let us admit that the narratives which tell us about Moses were written five hundred or six hundred years after his time; that, so far as we can tell, no word of Moses, not a line of his writing, has come down to us; yet arguing back from what we know of Israel in the days of the prophets, and in the age preceding that of the prophets, we are driven to demand some such figure as the Moses of tradition: a man, that is, with a genius for religion and a capacity for leadership, possessed by an ardent devotion to God and by a passion for righteousness. And to him, we must believe, God did come with a penetrating, overwhelming revelation at some definite time and place. We cannot tell for certain when it was or where it

¹ Ex. iii. 2.

was; that is a matter of secondary importance. The vital thing is that God revealed and Moses grasped a new truth—the truth that Jehovah, the God of Moses' countrymen, was no mere God of fire or tempest or mountain, but a Being essentially of moral character, a God of Righteousness; more than the God of the tribe alone; in some sense, hardly yet understood, the only God in the world. And this revelation Moses determined to impart to his fellow-countrymen, and the subsequent course of Israel's religious history can only be explained on the ground that he did receive this revelation and impress it upon his times.

Let us see for a moment how the case stands with the prophets. From the account which they themselves give of the way in which they arrived at the knowledge of the truth, it is clear that they did not acquire it by contemplation or discovery or study of the works of their predecessors. There is always a conviction of immediate contact with God Himself. The experience is described under various forms; sometimes, as in the case of Amos, Isaiah, Ezekiel, there is a vision, and the prophet in ecstasy both sees and hears; sometimes there is a physical touch, a strong pressure of Jehovah's hand; or the prophet feels himself in the clasp of the divine Spirit, or finds himself admitted to Jehovah's conclave; more often the divine voice simply comes.¹ But the

¹ Am. iii. 7, vii. 15; Isa. vi. 1, viii. 11; Jer. i. 9, 11; ii. 1; Ezek. i. 1, 2; iii. 12; xi. 1, 24.

prophets themselves do not lay any stress on the manner of God's revelation; the fact of it is for them the important thing; they never doubt for a moment that the truth which they announce is not their own, but God's. At the same time, in delivering their message, their own individuality is not swept away; their faculties, already trained by spiritual experience, are quickened and uplifted by God's power into more powerful activity and more dutiful response.

One further illustration will be sufficient. In the case of St. Paul's conversion we have a New Testament instance of a direct external revelation, made at a definite time and place. Jesus the Nazarene made Himself known as the true Messiah, the risen Lord in glory, and yet present on earth with His persecuted servants. We cannot honestly explain this as a pictorial account of an inward emotional change. We must in fairness allow that the narrative is singularly natural and free from rhetoric; it fits in perfectly with the actual conditions of the moment. The fact of this self-revelation of the risen Jesus to St. Paul is borne out by the immense consequences which followed.

From the instances which we have been considering we gather that the Bible itself is penetrated with the idea of a direct revelation made by God from outside to man; while at the same time the revelation is made only to those who are prepared to receive it. A capacity for apprehension must be

there, a previous spiritual discipline, a familiarity with the ways of God. He reveals Himself to His friends, not to strangers: "The secret of the Lord is among them that fear Him; and He will show them His covenant."¹ We rightly detect a large human element in the Bible; and of course, strictly speaking, there can be no revelation until it is embodied in human thought and expressed in human language; but more unmistakable and emphatic is the divine element in the Bible, and we must recognize it to the full. We are undoubtedly justified in tracing a growth in the knowledge of religious truth; but here again we must do justice to all the facts. We must beware of any mechanical theory, for it is not true that the order of progress runs in a straight line from a crude naturalism up to a purified morality. Rather it seems to be the case that the most potent and far-reaching religious truths arrive in their full strength and brightness; and what follows is, as often as not, a dimming rather than an increase of the radiance. What we learn, then, from the Scriptures themselves is that God has, at different times and places, revealed Himself directly to man, and communicated divine truth which lay beyond man's unaided faculties; and that this revelation was communicated to those alone who already possessed the insight and capacity to receive it. Thus the antithesis implied by speaking of man's discovery or God's disclosure is not supported by

¹ Ps. xxv. 14.

anything to be found in the Bible itself. The knowledge of God, or progress in the apprehension of divine truth, is due neither to man's effort alone nor to God's action alone; it is due to both. God makes Himself known to those who are fit to know Him, and they learn to know more. The Psalmist expresses it to perfection: "In Thy light do we see light." And the Gospel states it as a very word of Christ: "He that hath, to him shall be given."¹

And this, which we may take to be the teaching of the Bible, is what we have been taught to regard as a fundamental law of nature. The living organism advances towards perfection according to its capacity to adapt itself to, and make use of, the external conditions of its life. Forces from outside are at work; forces from inside are quick to meet them; the perfect result comes from the action and the inter-action of the two.

And the teaching of the Bible is supported by the facts of experience. Those who in any degree are trying to know and to serve are perfectly familiar with the fact that spiritual truth is only to be apprehended by spiritual persons. The fault lies with us if we fail to see the vision. The deliberate, coarser sins obviously hide God from us; but it is not merely these which blind us to the truth; our conceit, our indolence, our self-importance may equally injure our power to see and know. And where does this power come from? How are we trained and made

¹ Mk. iv. 25; Lk. viii. 18, xix. 26; Mt. xxv. 29.

fit to advance in the knowledge of the truth? There can be no doubt about the answer of the religious heart. God is the beginning and God is the end. He reveals Himself to us still; not indeed as He revealed Himself to Moses or Isaiah or St. Paul, for they were the great ones of God; but in His own sure way, provided that we are waiting on Him with humble hearts and open minds. "In Thy light do we see light." The Old Testament uses a metaphor; the New Testament speaks of a Person. Jesus Christ has come as the divine Light of men, and He sends His Spirit of truth to guide us into all the truth. We who in this place are called to be learners ourselves and teachers of others may thank God and take courage. We are not left to grope helpless in the dark. God gives us the light if we are fit to receive it, and in that light we go forward in our work, till even such as we are may be enabled to see some part of the holy vision of the Truth.

II.
VISION AND FEAST.

destined to be so famous, lay hidden ; the present was taken up with a venture, heroic indeed, but all uncertain in its issues. At this rudimentary stage, however, one thing was gloriously certain ; while all else was dim, this shone clearly ; no doubt remained on the one point that really mattered. The leaders of the tribes, the best minds among them—"they saw the God of Israel."

Elsewhere in the account of what happened at Sinai we are told that the majesty of Jehovah was veiled in cloud and darkness ; there was earthquake and fire and the awful tones of a trumpet ; none dare approach ; Moses alone went up, and he into the cloud. But here it is entirely different. Moses and the elders stand in the holy calm of the house not made with hands, built not in the clouds, but like a palace with splendid pavement ; and there, enthroned in glory, they saw the God of Israel.

We may take this to mean that they personally came to know God as their living Lord and King ; and God vouchsafed to reveal Himself not in His overwhelming majesty, but in such a way as man could see and understand, with a divine condescension to man's capacity. Here is no theological abstraction, no vague theory of the being or nature of God, but a revelation of God to heart and conscience as a Person whom men can know and serve and love. There can be no doubt that Moses had taught his tribes a new truth about God ; he had impressed upon them his own high faith ; and Aaron and Nadab and Abihu

and the elders had responded ; they had given in their assent ; they had resolved to take Jehovah to be their God. But now they advance a step further in religious experience ; from assent they advance to apprehension. In our own hearts we know well what this means. We say the Creed, we assent to the truths of faith with our minds as founded upon authority which we believe to be reasonable and sufficient ; but we must advance beyond this if the truths of faith are to have a permanent effect upon our lives ; we must advance to vital knowledge or perception. This is what happened of old upon the Holy Mount, when those men "saw the God of Israel." Hence they were able to lead their people on to a new stage of progress. They had grasped the essential truth of religion, which is nothing else but the personal apprehension of a living God who can be known and loved and served.

"They beheld God." The Bible is a record of those, both men and women, who have encountered the vision of God. Isaiah saw the Lord high and lifted up ; St. John saw the First and the Last and the Living One ; the Incarnate Son said to His disciples, "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father also." The Bible also declares that "no man hath seen God at any time,"¹ that is, God in the fulness of Godhead ; "O that I knew where I might find Him," cries suffering Job, "that I might come even to His seat!"² The vision of God is one of

¹ John i. 18.

² Job xxiii. 3.

those truths which the Bible expresses by opposites ; we can and we cannot see God : meanwhile we are told to endure " as seeing Him who is invisible." He reveals Himself, and yet we know how much more there is to be revealed. You will remember that I called this ancient narrative in Exodus prophetic ; it seems to record the first experience of that vision which is in store for all God's faithful ; it carries us beyond the past and the present to that day when " His servants shall do Him service, and they shall see His face." ¹

But there is something more. " They beheld God, and did eat and drink." How mysterious, how significant ! The vision of God is followed by the meal in His presence. We cannot help thinking of that mysterious meal in the Gospel, when the disciples saw the risen Lord on the shore of the lake in the early morning, and He bade them " Come, break your fast." ² This meal on the mountain was a sacrament of fellowship. According to early custom, men ate and drank together as a sign that they had made a covenant ; we read of several such covenant-meals in the Old Testament ; ³ the custom was based on an instinctive piece of symbolism. But here the covenant is made between God and man. Moses and the elders celebrated a solemn meal of communion ; and however crudely primitive their idea may have been, I think that we may be sure that as they ate and drank in God's

¹ Rev. xxii. 3, 4.

² John xxi. 12.

³ Gen. xxvi. 30, xxxi. 46-54 ; Josh. ix. 14 ; 2 Sam. iii. 20.

presence they realized God's fellowship with them in a new way: they entered into a new relation with Him: henceforth He was their God and they His servants. Again we feel that there is something prophetic in the narrative; it points on to the blessing in store for those who are "bidden to the marriage supper of the Lamb."¹

It is to be noticed that the Vision and the Feast are brought into connexion with the giving of the Law. The personal apprehension of a personal God realized by heart and conscience involves a new relation with God, and this again carries with it practical consequences in life and conduct. Nothing can be more practical than a right knowledge of God. The Vision and the Covenant issue in laws of worship and moral duty; that is why the religion of Israel became a new force in the world. A religion which combined high thoughts of God with a binding moral sense, whose God exacted the homage of moral service, contained, even in its rude beginnings, an element of permanence and growth. Hence it came about that the wandering tribes, led and taught by Moses, won their way at last to a settled home, and by degrees imposed themselves upon a superior civilization, and in spite of frequent failures still held their own, and even out of disaster sprang into new vigour, and tightened their grasp of the truth and handed it on, until the ancient faith was taken up into a fuller revelation.

Thus in the far-off days Israel entered a fresh stage

¹ Rev. xix. 9.

in its career after that sublime encounter on the mount: with true prophetic insight tradition placed at the beginning of Israel's existence as the people of Jehovah the record of a Vision and a Feast; therein lies the secret of that destiny which Israel was enabled to fulfil. For us an imperishable significance dwells in the old prophetic story. True religion is the personal apprehension of God, known and perceived as our living Father, Saviour, Lord: "they saw the God of Israel." And to know God in this vital sense is to enter into a new relation of fellowship with Him: "they beheld God, and did eat and drink." And thus united with Him and with one another, we come down to face the tasks and duties of life strengthened to obey the Law of Him whose service is perfect freedom.

III.

FREEDOM AND RESPONSIBILITY.

“Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways, saith the Lord God. . . . Cast away from you all your transgressions, wherein ye have transgressed ; and make you a new heart and a new spirit : for why will ye die, O house of Israel ? For I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord God : wherefore turn yourselves and live.”—EZEK. xviii. 30–32.

III.

FREEDOM AND RESPONSIBILITY.

THE eighteenth of Ezekiel is one of the most powerful chapters in the Old Testament, judging by the effect which it has had upon religious life and thought. It contains the fullest statement of a doctrine which Ezekiel made peculiarly his own, and, like all the profounder truths of prophecy, it holds a living force for us to-day.

“No great idea,” says a modern writer, “is the product of a single mind.” It is the product of the time rather than of the individual. The labours and experiences of a whole generation contribute to prepare the way for the arrival of the man who, with insight given by God, makes the great discovery and interprets the meaning of their experiences to the men of his time. This is the task of the prophet. He shares the conditions of his day with the multitude whom he has to teach; he has received a common inheritance of beliefs and hopes and sufferings; he has received that, but something more, a more devoted faith and a clearer insight into truth. This is what God has given him: this is what makes him a prophet.

Ezekiel shared with his fellow-captives the worst calamity that can befall a people. They felt that it was God's punishment for their sins as a nation, for their disloyalty and rebellion; the prophet set his face hard against their faces, and told them so with unsparing severity. But those upon whom the judgment had fallen were not all ungodly; there were sincere servants of Jehovah among them; good and bad alike, however, suffered in the same calamity. "I will draw forth My sword out of its sheath, and will cut off from thee the righteous and the wicked":¹ so ran the pitiless sentence. It was this which seemed so hard, so out of keeping with what might be expected from the God of Israel. Men felt utterly adrift, they could not understand such treatment. Consequently, a hopeless despair settled upon them all, the good because they thought that their goodness had been thrown away, the bad because they knew that they were only receiving what they deserved. This despair is heard all through the literature of the period: "Our transgressions and our sins are upon us, and we pine away in them; how, then, should we live?" "We have transgressed and have rebelled; Thou hast not pardoned; . . . Thou hast covered thyself with a cloud, that our prayer should not pass through." "Zion said, Jehovah hath forsaken me, and the Lord hath forgotten me."² The exiles, at a loss for any better explanation,

¹ Ezek. xxi. 3 f.

² Ezek. xxxiii. 10; Lam. iii. 42-45; Isa. xlix. 14.

imagined that they were being punished for the sins of their fathers; they kept repeating the proverb which they had learnt in Jerusalem and heard Jeremiah denounce:¹ "The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge." They themselves were not responsible; the past and not the present was to blame.

What had Ezekiel to say to this? He insisted that the common sufferings were a just punishment for Israel's sins; but he saw deeper than his fellow-countrymen; in the hard light of affliction a profound and, at that time, a new truth was revealed to him. He works it out in the eighteenth chapter. He begins by attacking the popular proverb: it is deceptive and untrue. The son does not die for the iniquity of his father; the individual is not necessarily involved in the fate of his people. He puts case after case to illustrate his meaning. "The soul that sinneth it shall die; the son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son; the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him." In other words, the sins of the fathers do not drag down the children by a fatal inheritance to a doom from which there is no escape; each individual is responsible personally, by himself; each human soul stands in direct, personal relation to Almighty God.

And the prophet carries his argument a step

¹ Jer. xxxi. 29 f.

further. If a man does not suffer for the sins of his fathers or his race, neither does he necessarily lie under the curse of his own past life. The wicked man may turn from his wickedness and do that which is lawful and right; then he shall save his soul alive. The dreadful alternative is equally open to him: he may turn from his righteousness and die. But God does not want the sinner to die; He has no pleasure in death. God wants the sinner to repent; and the sinner is *free*; he can cast off the shackles of his past life; he need not be the slave either of the sin which he has inherited or of the sin which he has committed. He is *free* to make him a new heart and a new spirit, and to "live" in the high sense in the blessed kingdom soon to be established on the earth.

Such is the inspiring truth which the prophet teaches: each soul is endowed with the priceless gift of moral freedom, stands free to break with its own past and with its fatal inheritance, because each soul stands in immediate relation to God and is personally responsible to Him. And it is God's prevailing will that men shall not die the death of sin, but live, with new hearts and spirits, in fellowship with Himself.

Perhaps we may think that Ezekiel presses his teaching to a point which goes beyond the facts of experience. For we know only too well that as a matter of fact the sons do suffer for the sins of their fathers. It is perfectly true that we do inherit

physical defects and moral weaknesses from our parents: it is equally true that we do, and, by the laws of our nature, must suffer the consequences of our own sins in the past. Evil consequences do remain, but not this consequence—that we are held in the grip of an inexorable fate from which we can never escape. We possess a blessed freedom, an independence, however weakened, however difficult to assert, which enables us to rise above the consequences of sin even while we have to bear them, and brings each of us into personal relation with God. Moral freedom, and not the bondage of sins, inherited or our own, is the ultimate truth about human nature. The Gospels and the apostles support the prophet here.

It is the secret of recovery and of all spiritual progress. But think what it means to be brought into direct personal relation with Almighty God. We may exult with humility in the conviction of our moral freedom; it lifts a burden off our souls; but do we realize that because we are free we are responsible? No one can relieve us of this position, so precious yet so tremendous. No one can bear the responsibility for us, no Church, no priesthood, no loved one nearest to us. It must be faced, each soul by itself alone, alone with God. Separately, singly, we live our life with God, as we really are, with our sins upon us. In that overpowering presence we seem to hear a divine voice, and it is a voice of mercy: "I have no pleasure in the death

of him that dieth"; "make you a new heart and a new spirit"; "turn yourselves and live." And He who speaks to us of recovery and new life is our Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; He pleads and presents His sacrifice as our Priest in the heavenly temple; through His sacrament the Holy Spirit accomplishes a closeness of communion, a directness of personal relation to Himself, which surpasses while it fulfils the prophet's dream.

IV.

ONE KING, ONE SHEPHERD.

“And one king shall be king to them all ; and they shall no more be divided ; . . . and they shall all have one shepherd.”—EZEK. xxxviii. 22, 24.

IV.

ONE KING, ONE SHEPHERD.

SUCH was the prophet's dream of the days to come: his people once more governed by a king, and once more united as a nation. A central authority acknowledged by all, as the symbol of a new sense of corporate life—that was the prophet's hope and consolation. Ezekiel prophesied during the Captivity; the Jewish state had been overthrown; the last king of Judah had shamefully been put to death; Jerusalem and the temple lay in ruins; the people had been driven into exile in a strange land. Disaster more complete can hardly be imagined. Was this to be the end of all the famous past and of all the glorious promises? The prophet never flinches for a moment from driving home the stern moral of Israel's miserable condition; what else could be the result of the nation's wilful disobedience and disloyalty and degradation? No prophet is more severe in denouncing the nation's sins; but no prophet has a clearer insight into the future. He never lets go his lofty hopes for the people; among them is that shadowed forth in the text. Divided, scattered though Israel be, a moral failure and a political wreck, without a

leader, without a home, yet there was a future in store for Israel by the mercy of God.

“And one king shall be king to them all; and they shall no more be divided; . . . and they shall all have one shepherd.”

In the past there had been rival kings of Israel and Judah. The prophet looked forward to the day when there would be one king to rule over God’s people, a central authority whom all would obey; Israel must have a king, for no vigorous national life was possible without one. And the old feuds and jealousies must be buried in the past. The ancient split between north and south had always been a grief to the prophets, and Ezekiel felt it as keenly as the prophets before him.¹ If there was to be one king and shepherd, so there must be one nation upon the mountains of Israel, a nation outwardly united and inwardly reformed, for the prophet’s ideal could never be attained by unconverted men. To bring about this unity a great moral reformation must first be achieved; the old defilements must be swept away, and God’s holy will taken as the rule of life. And God Himself would accomplish the inward change; “I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean; a new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you, . . . and cause you to walk in My statutes; . . . and ye shall be My people, and I will be your God.”² Ezekiel did not stand

¹ Hos. i. 11; Isa. xi. 13; Jer. iii. 18.

² Ezek. xxxvi. 25-28.

alone in his belief in the future destiny of Israel. His hopes, his dreams, were shared by a faithful band among the exiles in Babylon. It was their loyalty which, under God, saved the true religion from collapsing when the nation was reduced to ruin. They upheld the great ideal, they kept the faith alive even in Israel's darkest hour: one more proof that it is the men of faith, the men of visions, who are the supremely important people and the true saviours of their country.

"And one king shall be king to them all; and they shall no more be divided; . . . and they shall all have one shepherd."

As a matter of fact Ezekiel's prophecy was never fulfilled in the way which he imagined. The ancient glories of the monarchy were never restored; the visible head of a united nation never set up his throne in David's place. Some hundreds of years later the Maccabæan princes indeed established a monarchy of some kind, but it was a brief and disappointing copy of Israel's kingship in the old days. This shows us that we are to look for the fulfilment of prophecy in something larger and deeper than the literal fulfilment of the prophet's language. The very fact that Ezekiel's hope was never realised in the way he imagined bids us seek elsewhere for its translation into fact.

"And one king shall be king to them all." Where is the central authority which all can obey? Who is it that has an unlimited claim upon our allegiance? Some authority we must have to govern our lives; and the

reason why so many people are distracted and aimless and unhappy is because they have no king; or they are uncertain as to where the sovereign is to be found, or they do not really trust him. Are we taking Jesus Christ to be our King and Shepherd? Does He control practically our actions and desires? Are we trying to carry out our obedience in detail, in the way we spend our time and do our work and take our pleasures? You ask to be shown the authority which has a supreme right to your allegiance: you will find it in Jesus Christ. His character and example, His teaching and works of power, are recorded in the Gospels. And that is not all. They are revealed further in the Church which preserves the Faith, and offers the worship of believing hearts. And that is not all. Your own conscience will tell you that the claim of Christ is higher than any other and wholly righteous, and that you only find happiness in obeying it. No vigorous or worthy life is possible otherwise.

“And they shall no more be divided.” It is a national ideal which the prophet had in his mind, a new Israel made up of converted men, who unite themselves to obey one common king and to pursue one common aim. And it is precisely this which we are apt to overlook; for in our religious life we are so much taken up with our private needs and feelings that we give very little thought to the Christian fellowship or society to which we belong. Salvation comes to us not as individuals but as members of a Body. The worship which we offer here is not our private

devotion but the common act of the whole company of the faithful; the sacraments which we celebrate are social rites, the one incorporating us into the Christian Body, the other keeping fresh and unbroken the common life which we share with each other and with our common Lord. This corporate life of a united nation, all obeying one sovereign, all joined in one great brotherhood of service, this is what Ezekiel saw in prophetic vision. And this is the vision which we also have to cherish. How often our church-membership means to us little more than a preference for some particular type of service or of preaching! Instead of developing in us a sense of brotherhood and corporate worship, so much of our interest in Church matters is only another name for narrowness of mind, or pettiness, or harsh judgments on those who do not agree with our own views of things! As in Ezekiel's day so in ours, there is a sore need of a moral reformation; we too have to learn to sink our jealousies and enlarge our sympathy. The very fact that we worship in this ancient Cathedral, which all through the centuries has stood for corporate Christian life and witness, is in itself an inspiration. The mother-church of the diocese ought to be the very home and centre of diocesan worship and intercession, a pattern in dignity and worthiness to its daughter churches, far-reaching in its influence, large-hearted in its concern for the welfare of the whole body. What a privilege is ours! What use are we making of it? And I cannot help thinking that we Church-

people in this place, who live in such close contact with the Army and Navy, have much to learn from the two great services, particularly from their fine sense of loyalty to their common life and duty. We too belong to a great service, and the spirit of the whole system ought to discipline the spirit of each member of it. When we all unite to live and work for God, then indeed the witness of the Church will become a force for truth and righteousness! And even we are one with the saints, with the prophets and men of vision, with the loyal and true-hearted servants of God who are asleep in Christ; all pure and faithful spirits are with us, for we are all ruled by the same Lord. The prophet's hope has been fulfilled for us: "And one king shall be king to them all; and they shall no more be divided; . . . and they shall all have one shepherd."

V.

WATERS FROM THE SANCTUARY.

‘And by the river, upon the bank thereof, on this side and on that side, shall grow every tree for meat, whose leaf shall not wither, neither shall the fruit thereof fail : it shall bring forth new fruit every month, because the waters thereof issue out of the sanctuary ; and the fruit thereof shall be for meat, and the leaf thereof for healing.”—EZEK. xlvii. 12.

V.

WATERS FROM THE SANCTUARY.

EXILED in Babylon, far away from temple and home, the prophet Ezekiel saw his vision of the future. A land resettled, a temple rebuilt, a nation organized as a religious society, and Jehovah enthroned once more with visible splendour in the midst: these were to be the chief features of the coming age. In a unique degree Ezekiel combined in his own person the functions of priest, lawgiver, and prophet. The priestly interest perhaps lay nearest to his heart. His predecessors in prophecy showed little sympathy with the ceremonial side of religion as it was practised in their day; but Ezekiel, both by character and training, was led to take a line of his own. He felt the pressure of new religious needs. The exile had profoundly altered the conditions of the national life; henceforward political ambitions, now that the monarchy was overthrown, must give way to the aims of a religious community; if Israel was to survive at all it must survive as a Church. Accordingly Ezekiel formulates an ideal code for the Church-nation of the future. Perhaps it may be truer to call it an ideal picture of Israel in its state of final

restoration and felicity, organized in every department as the holy people of the holy God. The entire organization is grouped round the temple, which stands as the central object of the country, raised upon a paved platform above the surrounding hills, the settled dwelling-place of the God of Israel. The temple itself is planned with courts and chambers in an ascending scale of holiness the nearer they approach the innermost shrine. Outside stretches the territory of the priests and Levites, the guardians of Israel's holiness; then the territory of the prince who is to furnish the holy oblation; and then, north and south, the portions of the twelve tribes. Thus the nation is organized on the principle of holiness, and the land becomes "a sanctuary for the sanctuary."¹ The presence of Jehovah sanctifies the temple in which He dwells, and radiates thence throughout the land. All uncleanness is carefully fenced off; no opening exists for converted heathen; Israel is exclusively separated for Jehovah, and lives absorbed in His service.

The ideal is characteristic of the lawgiver and the priest. And that it may be practically attained Israel is to be gathered from among the nations whither they be gone; the old divisions are to vanish; one king shall be king to them all, a scion of the ancient dynasty, a new David. In order to enjoy the blessings of this restored state, in which the land itself is to be transformed, the dry bones of

¹ Ezek. xlv. 4.

Israel will be quickened into life: "I will put My spirit in you, and ye shall live."¹ A resurrection from the dead is promised, but a resurrection, observe, confined to Israelites. There is no hope for the heathen; they will be visited with the extreme severity of Jehovah's wrath. The impious troops of Gog and the land of Magog will perish under an overflowing shower, great hail-stones, fire and brimstone. The nations, so far as they survive at all, are preserved merely that they may know that "I am the Lord, the Holy One in Israel."²

This may be thought an ungenerous, narrow-minded outlook for a prophet. But Ezekiel's teaching was fully justified by the supreme need of the moment. If Israel was to outlive the national misfortunes it must be concentrated, it must protect itself from all risk of contamination, there must be no doubt about its own distinctive life. For Ezekiel this meant practical holiness, dedication to Jehovah and separation from heathen defilements; and if at times we grow impatient of his prosaic measurements and elaborate detail, we must bear in mind that underlying it all is a profoundly spiritual conception, that of Israel's bounden holiness. What possibilities lay in Ezekiel's characteristic idea may be illustrated by the beautiful piece of symbolism which he has given us himself. Amid surroundings intensely abhorrent to his nature, the prophet must often have travelled back in thought to the temple, now in ruins, but to

¹ Ezek. xxxvii. 14.

² Ezek. xxxix. 7.

his enthusiastic affection capable of such rich enlargement in the future. He thought of the fountain and its stream which sprang from the south-east corner of the temple rock, a stream very dear to the heart of patriotic Israelites, "the waters of Shiloah that go softly," "the river whose streams make glad the city of God."¹ To Ezekiel in his vision it seemed as if these waters, springing from under the very altar and threshold of the temple, swelled into a river, which gathered volume as it flowed eastward down to the valley of Jordan. An elixir lay in this healing stream, which transformed the arid gorge through which it flowed. On either bank trees appeared, with leaves and fruit of mystic virtue, fed by the bountiful current, which at last sweetened the barren, bitter waters of the Dead Sea itself: a symbol of the future developments and blessed influences, which might one day flow from the religion of Israel as Ezekiel conceived it!

The work of the prophet affected powerfully the subsequent religious history of his people. His zeal and affection for the ceremonial of the temple and the altar of Jehovah "are found reflected, in softer moods and phases, in many a hymn among the Psalter."² He belonged partly to the old order, for he was a prophet who called his age to repentance and proclaimed the inevitable judgment; but he belonged also to the new. He was the spiritual

¹ Isa. viii. 6; Ps. xlv. 4.

² Montefiore, *Hibbert Lectures*, p. 240.

ancestor of Ezra and of the men who, one hundred and fifty years later, introduced the codified book of the Law. In a true sense Ezekiel may be looked upon as the parent of Judaism. To his influence we can trace that spirit of legalism and national exclusiveness which, with all its limitations, bore such noble fruit in the passionate loyalty of the Jewish race during the troubled times which followed, and was the instrument in God's providence for preserving the faith of Israel unimpaired until the Messiah was born out of Judah.

Not many years later another prophetic voice was heard in Babylon proclaiming a message which stands in significant contrast to that of Ezekiel. It was the voice of that Unknown Prophet whose prophecies are contained in Isaiah xl.-lv. He brings to the front and develops that other characteristic of Israel's religion, its claim to be the only true religion for all the world. Like Ezekiel, this prophet announces the restoration of Israel to its own land; but the great act of deliverance reaches farther in its effects; it is "an ensign to the nations,"¹ a signal evidence of God's intention not to punish them but to save them. Israel is to return not merely to accomplish its own perfection in holiness, but to take up its mission to mankind. By this time the fundamental truth had been firmly grasped; it now receives triumphant statement: Jehovah is more than the God of Israel; He is the only true God;

¹ Isa. xlix. 22.

beside Him is no godhead at all. Israel was the sole guardian of this lofty creed; Israel alone could make it known; it was the foundation of all true religion for all the world. And there rises before the prophet's mind an ideal figure whose character and office correspond with the universal range of the prophecies. He is no David, nor prince of David's line; he is the personification of Israel in its ideal aspect as the servant of the Lord; his function is to carry the light to the Gentiles, and it is his appointed lot to suffer as the servants of God always suffer in a hostile and unbelieving world; his very sufferings form part of his missionary labour. The prophet's Messiah, if we may use the term, has the universal character which marks the prophet's teaching.

To complete the picture we must take into account the last eleven chapters of the Book of Isaiah, chs. lvi.—lxvi., the work of another unknown prophet who probably lived and wrote among the restored community at Jerusalem some seventy years later than the author of chs. xl.—lv. As with Ezekiel, so with this later prophet, the temple occupies a central place in the glorious age to come. But while Ezekiel surrounds the temple with a leaguer of guardian priests and tribes to protect the sanctuary from all invasion, the third Isaiah throws it open to the Gentiles. He sees the courts crowded with obedient heathen: "Thy gates shall be open continually; they shall not be shut day or night; that men may bring thee the wealth of the nations, and their kings led

with them.”¹ All that is honourable and precious in the world shall contribute to the glory of Israel. The nations, instead of being punished because they are heathen, shall be punished if they refuse to become servants of the glorified Zion. The character of the temple itself undergoes a change; “mine house shall be called the house of prayer for all peoples.” Eunuchs that obey God’s law shall find a memorial and a name within God’s house; strangers, too, that join themselves to the Lord, shall be brought to God’s holy mountain and made joyful in His house of prayer.² Such is the prophet’s glowing faith in Israel’s place in the universal scheme.

The influence of these prophecies may be traced in the writings of Haggai and Zechariah, of Malachi and Jonah, just as we have seen that the influence of Ezekiel made itself felt in the subsequent course of Israel’s religious history. We have here two apparently opposite points of view, of legalism and exclusiveness on the one hand, of Israel’s universal mission on the other. The working out of these contrasted ideals in practice gives its peculiar interest to the fortunes of the Jewish community after the return from exile. To reconcile them was indeed a task beyond most men’s capacity. The party in favour of comprehensiveness was apt to become latitudinarian; it was easier to make alliances with the heathen than to convert them. The party of the law often showed itself doctrinaire and unpractical.

¹ Isa. lx. 11.

² Isa. lvi. 4-7.

The sort of struggle that went on is illustrated by the book of Jonah. The typical Israelite would positively rather fly from the presence of the Lord than carry the Lord's message to a great heathen city: yet at last the jealous spirit is overmastered, and the preaching is proclaimed in "Nineveh"; the heathen repent, and the divine pity triumphs.

In the best type of Judaism the two principles were no doubt brought into combination. Devout and prophetic minds there were which realized that Israel must be preserved as the guardian of the law, but preserved for the benefit of the world at large. We find in the Psalter, for example, such a Psalm as the 119th, that fervent meditation on the Law as the sufficient rule for conduct, the soul's delight and Israel's guide in the midst of persecution; and again such a Psalm as the 87th, in which Rahab and Babylon are named as "among them that know me," and Philistia and Tyre and Ethiopia as furnishing proselytes, and we see the Church of Zion expanding into the Church Catholic.

To follow the working out of these two dominant ideals in the time of the later Judaism would carry us beyond our limits. One further point, however, remains to be noticed. The principle of exclusion, which, superficially regarded, can be set in a very unfavourable light, has in fact at bottom a profoundly spiritual conception, as we have tried to show, in the doctrine of Israel's bounden holiness, which involves the consecration of every part of life to Jehovah's

service. It was necessary for Israel's preservation. But why was Israel to be preserved in this manner? The spiritual aims cherished by such teachers as Ezekiel and his successors were never satisfied by the legalism of the Rabbis and the Talmud. The yearning for righteousness and complete harmony with the holy will of God could, we believe, only be met by some fuller revelation of God's grace by which man can attain to holiness, and of God's love by which man can be received into union with Him. The characteristic principle of Judaism finds its full development in the Church of the Holy Spirit of Jesus Christ, in the union of manhood and Godhead in His Person.

The other ideal which we have been considering attained no fuller satisfaction than the first. The hopes which gathered round the restored temple were doomed to disappointment. Age after age waited for the exaltation of Zion and the homage of the Gentiles, but they never arrived. Not that Israel ever forgot its mission to the world; in the later times a vigorous proselytism was carried on in most parts of the Roman Empire, and Israel never ceased to guard its sacred treasure of faith in the One God. But the very fact that the promises were not fulfilled in the way expected showed that God had some other fulfilment in view. The ancient religion possessed an unlimited capacity for growth. The universal outlook of the prophets passes into the universal message proclaimed by the

Prophet of Nazareth and by His Apostle St. Paul: "Ye shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem and in all Judæa and Samaria, and to the uttermost part of the earth"; "Christ hath been made a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, that He might confirm the promises given unto the fathers, and that the Gentiles might glorify God for His mercy."¹

Thus from the temple and altar of Zion issued that stream which nourished trees for fruit and leaves for healing, the stream which appeared to the Christian seer as a river of water of life, bright as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb.²

¹ Acts i. 8 ; Rom. xv. 8, 9.

² Rev. xxii. 1.

VI.

THE EXPANSION OF JERUSALEM.

“And I lifted up mine eyes, and saw, and behold, a man with a measuring line in his hand. Then said I, Whither goest thou? And he said unto me, To measure Jerusalem, to see what should be the breadth thereof, and what should be the length thereof. And, behold, the angel that talked with me stood still, and another angel came forth to meet him; and he [*i.e.* the angel that talked with me] said unto him, Run, speak to yonder young man, saying, Jerusalem shall be inhabited as villages without walls, by reason of the multitude of men and cattle therein. For I, saith the Lord, will be unto her a wall of fire round about, and a glory will I be in the midst of her.”—ZECH. ii. 1-5.

VI.

THE EXPANSION OF JERUSALEM.

THE new Jerusalem was the problem of the hour :
How was it to be built up? When were the prophecies to be fulfilled? A band of exiles had arrived from distant Babylon with great words ringing in their ears, great visions rising before their eyes. "Behold, I will set thy stones in fair colours, and lay thy foundations with sapphires. And I will make thy pinnacles of rubies and thy gates of carbuncles, and all thy border of pleasant stones. And all thy children shall be taught of the Lord, and great shall be the peace of thy children."¹ With words like these the Second Isaiah had kindled the hopes of the exiles. And then Ezekiel, after the destruction of the city and temple, had seen his vision as he lay by the waters of Babylon; he saw the temple rebuilt, furnished and ordered in minutest detail, and the holy city laid out around it; all was ready for Jehovah's return to His deserted shrine, and for the home-coming of His banished people. Presently the prophet witnessed the solemn entry of the Lord, the God of Israel, into the sanctuary by the eastern gate;

¹ Isa. liv. 11 ff.

“And behold, the glory of the Lord filled the house of the Lord; and I fell upon my face.”¹ It was this vision which the returning exiles brought home with them to Jerusalem. The interest and the pathos of the situation are to be found in the dreams which filled the hearts of the faithful; and indeed at all times in a nation’s history such aspirations and common hopes possess more significance than the bare realities. But how and when were the prophecies to be fulfilled? that was the urgent question; and the prophet Zechariah came forward with an answer. He too had his visions like the rest, and this is what he saw: a young man with a measuring line in his hand about to measure the ground-plan of the new Jerusalem. By the prophet’s side there stood an angel-interpreter, just as Virgil or Beatrice stood beside Dante in his visions; and when another angel appeared upon the scene, the interpreter bade him run and stop the young man with the measuring line, and for this reason: the Jerusalem of the future was not to be rebuilt on the same lines as the Jerusalem of the past; no measurements would be needed; for the new city was to be built upon a larger scale, to make room for the large increase of its citizens; it was to lie open like an unwall’d town, capable of indefinite expansion; and as for defences, stone walls would not be needed, for Jehovah Himself would be a wall of fire round about, and His glorious presence would dwell within the city. Observe the fine

¹ Ezek. xliv. 1 ff.

mingling of the outward and the inward. The material fabric is not to be dissolved into a mere symbol or picture ; there is to be a city, and it is to be inhabited by a multitude of men and cattle ; but the material fabric is to be spiritualized, the circumference a wall of fire, the centre Jehovah's presence in glory ; matter and spirit, human and divine, welded into one corporate whole. As we follow the track of the prophet's thought, we catch already a glimpse of the shining climax to which it leads.

But we must turn to the vision. There is the young man with the measuring line. He represents the narrow and mechanical interpretation of prophecy which led to sad disappointments and grievous loss in the history of Judaism, and is by no means extinct among us now. For it is a tendency in human nature to imagine that we can apply our human measurements to God's plan and purpose. Those Jewish exiles imagined that the future was simply to reproduce the past ; the Jerusalem they had in their minds was the strong fortress which could resist attack, the guardian of the nation's throne and altar, wherein Israel might dwell secure from the heathen world outside. On these lines, then, the city was to be measured out ; the first business was to see what should be the breadth thereof and what should be the length thereof.

But it was exactly this short-sighted view of the destiny of Israel which the interpreting angel hastened to correct. God's purpose was wider than men

imagined; it could no longer be contained within the boundaries which had sufficed for earlier needs; God's city must be built without walls. There must be ample room for expansion, space for more citizens, for a wider franchise, for a bolder confidence in the future. And lest any man should be afraid to welcome this larger view, Jehovah Himself promised the defence of His encircling guard and the illumination of His abiding presence. Here, in this vision of Zechariah, we have presented to us in vivid contrast the rival elements in the faith of Israel, the temper which was always in favour of setting up stone walls and living within them, and the temper which refused to be confined, and looked beyond and trusted God. These elements run deep in human nature; they need not be rivals, if we can once learn how to be both loyal to the past and open-minded towards the future, and how to maintain the material fabric, the outward institutions, for spiritual ends. But what we see in the history and literature of Israel which followed the age of Zechariah is the struggle between these opposing elements; the reconciliation was to come later.

The great truth impressed upon Zechariah by his vision was not entirely new; earlier prophets had encouraged the larger outlook and hailed the prospect of the expansion of Jerusalem. "Thine eyes shall see the King in His beauty, they shall behold a far-stretching land."¹ The great unknown prophet of the return from Babylon had pictured the children

¹ Isa. xxxiii. 17.

of the new Jerusalem saying, "The place is too strait for me; give place to me that I may dwell"; he had exhorted them, "Lengthen thy cords, and strengthen thy stakes."¹ But when it came to the point, disillusionment took the place of hope; the prophet's ardent dreams were not to be accomplished yet. In the century after Zechariah, we find Ezra organizing the Jewish community on the most exclusive principles, and Nehemiah setting to work at once to repair the walls of Jerusalem and to collect the people within them for protection. So far from any thought of welcome for converted Gentiles, the main object of the religious leaders was to safeguard the community from heathen surroundings. Consolidation rather than expansion was the supreme necessity, if the Jewish faith and nation were to survive at all. In the centuries which followed, as the Persians succeeded to the Babylonians, and the Persians again gave place to the successors of Alexander, and Syria and Egypt fell under changing powers, sometimes friendly, sometimes hostile to the struggling little nation in Jerusalem—during this period the main religious tendencies were making for the preservation rather than the enlargement of the distinctive faith and practice of Judaism. It was the period when the faithful turned to the past for encouragement and idealized their ancient history, and studied the writings of the prophets, annotated and added to them, in a wistful effort to adjust their belief in God's particular providence to the non-

¹ Isa. xlix. 20, liv. 2.

fulfilment of His promise. At last, in the second century B.C., we come to the Book of Daniel, and what do we find? A life-and-death struggle going on between loyal Israelites and a wanton heathen persecutor of their religion. Death any day rather than eat the heathen meat, or profane the Sabbath, or sacrifice to idols, or neglect the hours of prayer! The spirit of martyrs and confessors is abroad, and it is no narrow creed which such men champion. They have their wide outlook, their grasp of principles. They are convinced that no heathen powers can in the end prevail against God, that the truth is bound to triumph and the kingdom of God to be established. And they were bold enough to fix a date; in three and a half years deliverance would come, and the reign of the holy people of God begin. So in former days the prophets had again and again expected, a great act of salvation was at hand, to be followed at once by the dawn of a glorious day. But no! it was not to be. The hour was not yet come.

The Book of Daniel is our one canonical specimen of a considerable body of literature which came into vogue at this period. We may see the beginnings of it in the visions of Zechariah, one of which we are trying to interpret. When the succession of prophets came to an end, their place was taken by the apocalyptic writers. The Jewish apocalypses reflect significantly the thoughts that were uppermost in the minds of the people. They were popular writings, widely and eagerly read. They conjured up glowing

pictures of the Messiah and the Messianic age; and in the main they encouraged a spiritual, supernatural conception of Israel's place in the divine plan. In some passages indeed the hope of Israel is fixed upon purely worldly or material objects; the Messiah is of the seed of David; He is to establish a temporal kingdom, and the enemies of Israel are to be destroyed with fire and sword; here exclusive, nationalistic conceptions predominate. On the other hand, we find not infrequent expression of the larger view: the Messiah is to come at the end of the world, and all the Gentiles will submit to Him; the enemies of God are to be destroyed, but with spiritual weapons; "it is no more a question of the supremacy of Israel alone, but all men who are faithful to God are to belong to the Messianic kingdom."¹ And when we turn from the Apocalypses to those books which belong to the Apocrypha, we notice similar conceptions of the destiny of Israel; on the one hand we have in 1 Maccabees xiv. the idealized description of the days of Simon the Maccabee, anticipating the peace and plenty, the justice, the zeal for the Law and the temple, which are to characterize the times of the Messiah; here the ideal is largely temporal and restricted: but on the other hand we find in Tobit a fine passage which tells of the future return and the building up of the house of God on a more glorious scale, and the conversion of all the nations to fear the

¹ Oosterley and Box, *Religion and Worship of the Synagogue*, p. 201.

Lord God truly: "And all they that love the Lord God in truth and righteousness shall rejoice, showing mercy to our brethren."¹

Here, then, we follow the stream which sprang from the heights of prophecy. Sometimes its waters flow within narrow banks; the more restricted views of the Messiah and His age had their home on the soil of Palestine among the schools of the Pharisees: but at times the stream widens out and will not be kept within its narrower bed; and in these larger, universal hopes and aspirations we have the cherished dreams of the Jews of the Dispersion, who had their homes in the great world outside the hills of Judah.

Whether wide or narrow, the current of prophetic ideals and hopes was still flowing; the expectation which the prophets had aroused was still alive; and hearts were waiting to enter into the promises up to the very moment when the fulness of the times was come.

But over against this prophetic temper, nurtured and trained by the larger faith of Israel, was that rival temper of which I spoke before, that temper which desired Jerusalem to be fortified with stone walls, which would keep the city of God strictly within the ancient bounds and leave no room for expansion and growth. While one section of Judaism turned towards the coming age with a large-hearted and open gaze, another section fixed its attention upon the Law and all that it implied. Its spirit was

¹ Tobit xiv. 5-7.

scholastic, national, exclusive; it was hostile to the larger faith: and in order to strengthen the position of the Law attempts were made to check the popularity of the apocalyptic books. There was a time when religious effort was bound, as we have seen, to aim at consolidation rather than expansion; but that time was passed. When Israel's great opportunity arrived the momentous issue presented itself; which was to prevail, the larger or the narrower faith? Was the new Jerusalem to be measured out on the lines of the past, or was it to be inhabited as a city without walls and welcome an unlimited access of new citizens, and make the great venture simply trusting in God's protection and abiding presence?

The Gospel proclaimed by Jesus Christ made it clear at once how He would decide the issue. Offspring of David's line, the outcome of Israel's eventful history, He made His appeal to the general heart of man, to man's universal need of a Saviour from the guilt of sin, to man's instinctive desire for righteousness and truth; the universal laws of conduct, the common Fatherhood and Love of God—such was the content of the Gospel. And in proclaiming it, Jesus Christ proved Himself to be the true successor of the prophets, the fulfiller of their hopes and visions. He came not to destroy, but to fulfil, not only the large ideals of the ancient faith, but its moral requirements, its insistence upon holiness both in heart and act. "Think not that I came to destroy the law or the prophets." He would advance His kingdom not by

excluding anything, but by including all that was capable of being adopted into God's larger plan as it was now announced. And just as Zechariah had been told to see in the Jerusalem of the future a foundation in which the material fabric was interpenetrated and encompassed by the spiritual presence of God, so the kingdom of heaven was founded by Jesus Christ with an outward embodiment, a Church with its external ministry and organization, but living with the life of His Spirit, one corporate whole in which the human is welded with the divine, which exists to bring man into union with God. Here we see the fulfilment of the larger faith of Israel. The stream of prophecy flows without a break into the current of the Christian Church.

When we turn to Rabbinic Judaism, however much we may appreciate its constancy, its learning, its indomitable patience, yet we must admit that it represents an attenuated line of development.¹ It is not large enough to contain the richer faith from which it sprang. Nothing less than the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and the Church of which He is the Lord and Head, can satisfy or fulfil the vision of the new Jerusalem. But while we speak of the fulfilment of prophecy let us not forget the lesson which our glance across the ages has suggested. Men were always asking, When are the prophecies to be fulfilled? Again and again the fulfilment was postponed, and it never came in the way which the faithful expected.

¹ Oesterley and Box, *l.c.* p. viii.

The non-fulfilment of prophecy is at least as instructive as the fulfilment. And with regard to the vision of Zechariah, which we have been considering, the full realization of it is still to come. The synagogue, "with its long continuous cry after God for more than twenty-three centuries," may well awake a responsive echo in our hearts. "Sound the great horn for our freedom, and lift a banner to gather our exiles, and gather us into one body from the four corners of the earth"—so runs the tenth of the great Eighteen Prayers of Judaism. And the Jewish liturgy still cherishes the promise given to Zechariah, while the prayer goes up for Jerusalem, "With fire thou didst consume it, and with fire thou wilt again rebuild it, as it is written, For I, saith the Lord, will be unto her a wall of fire round about, and a glory will I be in the midst of her!"

We too may still look forwards to the building and expansion of Jerusalem. Let us beware of our short-sighted views of God's purposes; our human measurements are useless and misleading. The narrow limitations of an older day will not be sufficient for the present or the future. We must have room to expand and grow; we must be large and generous in our welcome to the truth as it unfolds before us. Even if the old defences are inadequate, we will have no fear; but rather address ourselves to our high task with a firm confidence in God's protection of God's own cause, in the wall of fire around, in the glory which abides within.

VII.
THE MESSAGE OF JONAH.

VII.
THE MESSAGE OF JONAH.

“Should not I have pity on Nineveh, that great city?”—
JONAH iv. 11.

VII.

THE MESSAGE OF JONAH.

THE Gospel lays it down as a principle that he who loveth his life shall lose it. To work this out in practice raises a difficulty which is familiar to most of us: how are we to combine our religious duty towards ourselves with our religious duty towards others? It needs all our care and perseverance to keep the lamp burning in our own hearts; if the light that is in us be darkness, how great is that darkness! At the same time, if the inward light is not streaming out from us into the dark places of the world around, we are smothering the fire kindled by the Spirit of God. Indeed, we may test our progress in the knowledge and love of God by the way in which our sympathies are widening and we apprehend the vastness of the truth which we possess, the variety of its application, and the value for others of that which we find priceless ourselves. So it becomes a pressing question, How are we to prevent our service of God from being a self-absorbed devotion to our own religious interests? The problem is no new one; it is brought before us vividly in the book of Jonah, which further suggests a practical solution.

Let us try for a moment to realize the circumstances which led to the writing of the book. We can well understand the difficulty of the situation for the Jewish community which was settled at Jerusalem after the return from exile in Babylon. Everything had to be built up from the beginning, temple and city, church and state. The most spiritual minds were filled with a high sense of vocation; they felt themselves to be charged with the destiny of their race; it was vital to keep a jealous guard against all influences which might imperil the distinctive character of the community. Tradition mentions an offer made by the Samaritan neighbours in the early days of the Return to lend a hand in the rebuilding of the temple; it was firmly rejected.¹ In the last two chapters of Isaiah we read bitter things said about those who took laxer views and fell into heathen ways; probably it is the Samaritans and their Jewish friends who are aimed at; there was every need to make a firm stand if the community was to hold its own at all. As years went on the struggle to maintain the principle of exclusiveness became harder still. Mixed marriages threatened the very existence of the race and of the true religion. Ezra, if we may trust tradition, made a determined effort to get rid of the foreign wives.² His unpopular policy of "thorough" led to endless trouble and discord; but he was right; the time was not yet come for making risky alliances. Nehemiah

¹ Ezra iv. 1-3.

² Ezra x.

followed a little later, and achieved the triumph of the stricter party. The book of the Law was introduced and its provisions accepted by a national covenant; the community was safely established on a legal basis.¹ So far we can appreciate the policy of the religious leaders. Judaism, if it was to continue in existence, must make its own position secure.

But was this to be the beginning and the end? Were the larger views of the prophets to be allowed to pass into oblivion? Had their teaching lost all its force? Now that Israel had learnt that Jehovah was the one true God of all mankind, Israel was bound to proclaim this truth to the world. So the Second Isaiah had taught; and we may understand Isaiah liii. to mean that the sufferings of Israel in captivity had not failed to arrest the attention and impress the minds of the heathen world.² If the line of the prophets appeared to have come to an end, it was in order that Israel itself should assume the prophetic office and carry the light to the Gentiles. This was no hopeless task; for had not Jeremiah held out the prospect of the heathen turning from their evil? in which case Jehovah promised to repent of the evil which He had thought to do unto them.³ The temper of Judaism, however, in the generation or two after Ezra was not favourable to this wide outlook. However salutary and needful the work which he and Nehemiah had done,

¹ Neh. viii. and ix.

² Isa. xlii. 1, xlix. 6, 7; and see p. 188.

³ Jer. xviii. 7 f.

their influence had encouraged a self-centred and narrow exclusiveness which tended to lose sight of Israel's larger mission. But some faithful souls still cherished the great ideals; and at least one voice was raised in protest, and one noble effort was made to recall Israel to its true function.

This effort is embodied in the book of Jonah, which, properly interpreted, is seen to rank among the three or four finest products of Israel's religious genius, and to come as near to Christianity as anything else in the Old Testament.

At first sight we may be surprised to find such a book among the prophets, for it contains not prophecy but narrative. The main idea of the book, however, the teaching which it conveys, is thoroughly prophetic, although the lesson is taught by means of a story. Of course the story of Jonah is not to be taken as literal history; at the same time, it is historical in the sense in which the parable of the Good Samaritan, its New Testament counterpart, may be called historical.

The author chooses for his hero Jonah, the son of Amittai, a name which would be familiar to his readers as that of a prophet in the distant days of Jeroboam II.¹; and, like a true story-teller, in order to attract attention, he makes use of popular folk-lore. The great fish in the story is none other than the dragon or sea-monster which came originally from Babylonian tales, and is mentioned frequently in the

¹ 2 Kings xiv. 25.

Old Testament.¹ Perhaps the author of Jonah borrowed the idea from Jeremiah, who thus connects the sea-monster of popular imagination with the fortunes of Israel: "Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon hath devoured me; . . . he hath swallowed me up like the dragon; he hath filled his maw with my dainties; he hath cast me out. And I will bring judgment upon Bel in Babylon, and I will bring forth out of his mouth that which he hath swallowed up."²

And now for the story. Jonah the prophet was told by God to go to Nineveh, the typical stronghold of Israel's enemies, and warn the city that God's punishment was about to fall upon it. But the prophet hated the thought of going all the way into the far north-east to warn those cruel and wicked heathen. What were they to him? It was not that he feared to go; but at the bottom of his heart he dreaded lest his preaching should be successful. The heathen might listen and repent, in which case Jehovah would spare instead of destroying them; and the last thing the prophet wanted was that the heathen

¹ Sometimes called *Rahab* (Isa. li. 9; Job ix. 13, xxvi. 12; Ps. lxxxix. 10), or *the dragon* (Isa. xxvii. 1, li. 9; Jer. li. 34; Ps. lxxiv. 13 (plur.)), or *the serpent* (Amos ix. 3); cf. *the deep* (Gen. i. 2; Heb. *tēhōm*) and *Tīāmat*, the Babylonian dragon of chaos. Popular mythology also imagined a sky-monster called *leviathan* or *the flying serpent* (Isa. xxvii. 1; Job xxvi. 13).

² Jer. li. 34, 44. The figure of (*a*) being swallowed up, or (*b*) sinking in deep water, is frequently used by the poets of Israel's misfortunes; (*a*) Ps. lvi. 1, 2, lxix. 15, cxxiv. 3, 4; (*b*) Ps. xviii. 16, xlii. 7, lxvi. 12; Lam. iii. 54.

city should be spared. So he tried to avoid the detested mission by escaping over the sea. But a storm was sent against the ship that carried the disobedient prophet. He was not allowed to perish, however; a great fish swallowed him, and then vomited him up on shore. It was as though he had died and been brought to life again. Thus miraculously preserved, he is charged a second time with his mission to the heathen. There can be no escape now. He makes his way to the vast city, delivers his warning, and, wonderful to say, the warning is heeded. The Ninevites, from highest to lowest, men and cattle too, betake themselves to fasting; they cry for pardon; God hears and repents of the punishment which He had threatened.

It was exactly what the prophet had dreaded. He could not contain his indignation: Jehovah had actually treated those heathen with mercy instead of wrath! In his vexation and bitterness, like Elijah, he felt that life was no longer worth living.¹ And while he sat and waited outside the city he learned the lesson which God designed to teach him. A gourd sprang up miraculously and spread a grateful shade over him against the heat; next morning, no less miraculously, the gourd was withered! Again, in utter vexation, Jonah begged that he might die. Then the moral was driven home. "You are vexed about losing the gourd—a trifle like that! Is it not right that I should feel grief at having to punish

¹ Jonah iv. 3; cf. 1 Kings xix. 4.

a great city, 120,000 innocent children, beside a multitude of harmless cattle?"

So Jehovah, the God of heaven, does not confine His interests to Palestine or to the Jewish race. Sovereign Creator, He cares for all His creatures, even for the heathen, the ancient oppressors of His people. And His mercy travels as far as His universal rule; He is not only the righteous God who punishes iniquity, His nature and His name is love!

So Jonah, as we can now see, is a type of Israel, of Israel in its failure to rise to the height of its calling. Swallowed up, as it were, by the Babylonian monster, Israel had been restored to new life, and is summoned once again to take up its divinely-given task. It was not merely to perfect its own character in devotion that God had chosen Israel out of all the nations of the world; it was in order that Israel might carry to others the knowledge of the truth which it alone possessed. In this striking and suggestive book we listen to a prophetic voice proclaiming, in a day of lesser men and narrower views, the large theology which belonged, like a vital spark, to the very core of Israel's religion—the truth of Jehovah's universal rule and care for all mankind. No nation, however heathen or remote, lies outside His mercy; He longs and waits for their repentance; and upon the race whom He had chosen and trained He bestows not His exclusive patronage but a charge to co-operate with His universal purpose.

Can we wonder that our Lord Himself makes use of this noble book, so congenial to His own teaching? ¹ The "sign of Jonah" was the truly surprising appearance of a Hebrew prophet among the guilty heathen, proving God's care even for ignorant idolaters and sinners, and His desire to give them an opportunity to receive the tokens of His far-reaching love.

The prophetic story rouses us to shake off our narrow and selfish conceptions of religion; it helps us to solve the problem with which we started. We are not fulfilling our religious duty towards ourselves unless we are at the same time trying to fulfil our larger duty towards the world outside. At the centre of our religion lies the missionary obligation. We are chosen not for our own sake, but that others through us may be brought into the Kingdom. Let us never cease to contemplate the universal purpose of God, and lay to heart the truth that if our Saviour Christ hath been made a minister of the circumcision for His own people, it is that the Gentiles may glorify God for His mercy.²

¹ Luke xi. 29, 30.

² Rom. xv. 8, 9.

VIII.
THE MESSAGE OF JOB.

“I had heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear ; but now
mine eye seeth Thee.”—JOB xlii, 5.

VIII.

THE MESSAGE OF JOB.

MOST people probably admire the book of Job more than they read it. We all know that it contains some of the finest poetry in the Bible, but we shrink from the trouble of trying to understand it. Certainly the argument is difficult to follow; in many places there is much uncertainty about the meaning of the language; and all the way through the author clothes his thought in a wealth of imagery, which, however natural to an oriental poet, is apt to conceal his drift from western minds. But taking the book as a whole, and without going into details, we can, I think, gain a tolerably clear idea of its purpose, and we shall find that it has something to tell us of the utmost value.

Moments come to us when we cannot help asking the question, Why does God allow so much misery and pain in the world? Or thinking of some particular case which has been brought home to us, we wonder why the godly and the upright suffer while the irreligious worldling seems to prosper. Now this is the very problem, especially the latter form of it, which the book of Job discusses. At once, therefore,

we perceive that the book has a human interest, for it deals with a subject with which all of us are concerned. The problem constantly haunted the Hebrew mind: how is it that the righteous suffer and the wicked enjoy the good things of life? But at one period it became urgent. It was at the time of the Exile, and during the dark days which followed the Return, that the godly in Israel felt the full force of the oppressive power, first of the Babylonians, then of Persia. How can God permit His own people to endure such calamities and allow the heathen to triumph? We hear voices of perplexity and questioning in the writings of the prophets who belong to this period. "Righteous art thou, O Lord, when I plead with Thee; yet would I reason the cause with Thee; wherefore doth the way of the wicked prosper? wherefore are all they at ease which deal very treacherously?" To many, who did not look very deep, the way of the Lord seemed unequal. "Wherefore holdest thou thy peace when the wicked swalloweth up the man that is more righteous than he?" "It is vain to serve God: and what profit is it that we have kept his charge? They that work wickedness are built up; yea, they tempt God and are delivered."¹ Clearly this was the question which oppressed the minds of the faithful. They could find no clue to the misfortunes and persecutions which embittered their lot, for they had always imagined that God dealt with His people on

¹ Jer. xii. 1; Ezek. xviii. 25, 29, xxxiii. 17, 20; Hab. i. 13; Mal. iii. 14, 15.

the straightforward method of rewarding virtue with prosperity and wickedness with punishment. The author of Job, who lived certainly after the Exile, and probably some considerable time after, took up the problem, and treated it in a striking and original way. He makes use of a story, no doubt founded upon fact, which was well known to the people of his day,¹ and he adapts it freely to the purpose of a dramatic discussion. The scene is laid in the far-away times of the patriarchs; Job appears as an Arab chief, pious, wealthy, dignified like Abraham; stroke after stroke of misfortune falls upon him; he is smitten with a terrible form of leprosy; three friends arrive to condole with him; and presently the debate begins. It takes place, you notice, outside the territory of Israel, in the land of Uz, as it were upon neutral ground. By this skilful device the author secures a certain freedom of discussion; he does not wish to complicate the issue by any need of reconciling his views with the Israelite law and institutions. The subject, indeed, has more than a national interest; at the same time, we are never allowed to forget the background of actual hardship and distress which forced it to the front.² Into the lips of the three friends is put the current theory that suffering is the direct consequence of sin; each in turn supports his contention with a distinct line of argument, but all converging upon the same point. Job comes forward as the mouthpiece of a protest

¹ Ezek. xiv. 14, 20.

² *e.g.* Job vii. 1, ix. 24, xii. 6, 18-21, xiv. 1 f., xxiv. 12.

against the conventional view. Though he does not insist that he is sinless,¹ he denies that he is guilty of such an amount of sin as to justify such an amount of suffering. He will have it that he is innocent; he has done nothing to deserve such unparalleled calamity; the popular explanation does not square with the facts. Then, say the friends, so much the worse for the facts! One after another, as the argument goes on, they imply, and at last openly insist, that Job has committed all sorts of dreadful sins, though he refuses to admit it.² But Job still holds to his plea; he passionately accuses God of injustice, and yet, in spite of every provocation, he declines to give up his belief in God; he even reaches the curious state of mind in which he can appeal from God who is his relentless enemy to God who will one day vindicate his innocence.³ Now and again he is driven by his extremity to make a bold venture into the unknown. The doctrine of a future life did not form part of his creed; nevertheless the conviction seizes him with growing intensity that the justice denied in this life will be granted in another: "I know that my Vindicator liveth."⁴ The ray of hope dawns for a moment and then is extinguished: this was not to be the solution of the problem. So the controversy comes to an end with the friends still maintaining that the great sufferer must be the great sinner, and trying to force the facts to suit their theory, and with Job tenaciously asserting

¹ Job vii. 21, x. 14, xiii. 26.

² *e.g.* xxii. 5-10.

³ xvi. 11-19.

⁴ xiv. 13-15, xvi. 19, xix. 25-27.

that he is prepared to go before the seat of judgment, and prove at law that he is unjustly treated.¹ In this dramatic way the author shows how the traditional theory breaks down when confronted with actual experience; suffering cannot in every case be the direct result of sin.

Then, after the debate between Job and his friends, come the speeches of the Lord out of the whirlwind, those rapid, life-like descriptions of the wonders of nature, of the stars and skies, of beasts and birds, which many of us find the most attractive part of the book.² And the point of these chapters is to unfold the wisdom of God, who creates and orders the wonderful system of nature: such a God is not likely to leave man, and man's sufferings, outside the scheme of His providence. The moral is brought home to the sufferer. The fault lies not with God's justice but with the narrow conception of God which Job and his friends had so persistently maintained. They must learn to look deeper, and advance to larger views of God and His method of dealing with mankind. Job is reduced to silence; he abhors himself in dust and ashes.

Here we have what may be regarded as the author's chief contribution towards solving the problem. Strictly speaking, it is no solution at all; for instead of trying to answer the question, the author makes Job recover his sense of fellowship with God, and leaves him there to deepen experience and

¹ Job xxxi. 35-37.

² xxxviii.-xl. 14.

gain a truer insight into God's ways. "I had heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear; but now mine eye seeth Thee." Such is the author's main conclusion; but there are certain further considerations which he would have us bear in mind. At the beginning of the book we are introduced to the two scenes in heaven. Unknown, of course, to Job and his friends, the Satan appears before God and asks leave to put Job to the test. The reader is thus let into the secret that at any rate one purpose of Job's sufferings was to test the genuineness of his religion. In spite of the extremity of pain which touched him to bone and flesh, and stopped short only of depriving him of life, Job never succumbed entirely; he never gave up his faith in God. He stood the test. Here for once was a man who clung to God not only when he prospered but when he suffered; a religion which is genuine does not bargain with God; such a thing as disinterested goodness has been proved to be possible, however difficult it may be to understand the ways of God.

Then in the end Job is restored to prosperity. After all, God is on the side of the righteous even in this life. The wicked no doubt appear to prosper, but the righteous come in for the greater blessing. We cannot help feeling that this is rather a drop from the heights of the previous argument, and some scholars think that the Epilogue¹ was not written by the author of the poem, but incorporated from some crude

¹ Job xlii. 7-17.

popular version of Job's story. But it seems to me that the Epilogue, with its naive theology, is thoroughly true to the instincts of the Hebrew mind; the poet was not so far in advance of his times as to be completely emancipated from traditional habits of thought.

We may learn a sterling lesson from the main conclusion at which the author arrives. He shows his knowledge of human nature by not attempting an intellectual solution of the problem. The soul perplexed and overwhelmed by suffering needs not to be met with incontrovertible arguments, but to attain a deeper sense of God. Nothing short of that will really satisfy us. Many of us have discovered that if it were not for its sorrow the heart would not find its way to God. By an effort of reasoning we can advance a certain way, but we soon reach a point where reason alone fails us.

"God, whom I praise; how could I praise
If such as I might understand,
Make out and reckon on His ways?"

With fine perception the poet makes Job recover the sense of communion with God which he had almost lost under pressure; and in that blessed fellowship we can imagine the sufferer undergoing a spiritual change from defiant self-assertion to unquestioning trust. Our own perplexities about this difficult subject really come from our narrow views and our imperfect sense of God. He sends us suffering in order that we may

draw nearer to Him, and learn more of His wisdom and love, and fill our minds with worthier thoughts about Him. And we have received illumination. The dead weight of the traditional theory, which even in ancient times was found to be untrue to the facts of experience, has been lifted off our souls; for we can gaze with adoring faith upon the image of the Sinless Sufferer, who from His Cross tells us that suffering may become the supreme sacrifice for others, and God's own method of leading us to perfection.

IX.

THE TEACHING OF ECCLESIASTES.

“‘Vanity of vanities,’ saith the Preacher.”—ECCLES. i. 2.

IX.

THE TEACHING OF ECCLESIASTES.

IN other parts of the Bible we read of faith triumphant and of the unquenchable longing of the soul for God: human life is represented as struggling painfully upwards from the lower to the higher. Ecclesiastes introduces us to something entirely different. It tells the story of a soul which has almost lost the sense of religion, or rather the consolations of religious faith. There is hardly any variety of inward experience which does not find an echo in Holy Scripture: in this strange book we listen to the utterance of those doubts and questionings which at times assail us all.

When we try to grasp what the writer is aiming at we are met at once by a disconcerting difficulty. Side by side with the comments of despair or with counsels which might be given by an Epicurean, we come upon religious warnings or sententious proverbs which strike quite another note. Can it be the same man expressing himself in changing moods, or listening to "Two Voices," as in Tennyson's poem? A psychological subtlety of this kind would not have occurred to a Hebrew writer. We have to

thank modern criticism for providing us with a different clue, which makes the book perfectly intelligible.¹ Let us follow it along the main lines.

The Preacher, as he is called, meaning probably one who calls or addresses an assembly (*ecclesia*, hence *Ecclesiastes* in Greek), speaks throughout in his own person. He has had a wide experience of men and things, and made ample use of the opportunities which wealth and leisure brought within his reach. At one time he tried the pursuit of knowledge, only to discover that in much wisdom was much grief, and increase of knowledge meant increase of sorrow. At another time pleasure became the ruling passion; it brought him no satisfaction. He was no dreamy philosopher, living apart from his fellows; he thoroughly relished the intercourse and business of city life; he liked to keep an eye on mankind and their follies. And all the while at heart nothing touched him so keenly as the ills of human life. There is a sting in his words when he speaks of unworthy rulers and self-indulgent rich, of the oppressions and sufferings of the poor. Indeed, it was the problem of evil which lay heaviest on his mind. He can see no hope and no remedy; grievous to say, he can look forward to no hereafter. He finds no reason to believe that there is any difference between men and beasts in this respect: all alike go unto one place. God's work in the world can neither be traced nor under-

¹ See especially the commentary by Mr. McNeile (Cambridge, 1904).

stood; He appears to allow free licence to wrong and misery everywhere, and it is useless to try to mend it. No one has the least idea of what the future contains beyond a repetition of the present. So the Preacher "flings himself against fate in despair." He hates life, and he hates all his labour. He has tried to reach the highest good, but he has failed; he has tried to solve the riddle of existence, only to give it up as hopeless.

He comes to the conclusion that, after all, the best thing is to make the most of the present. At one moment, following his humour, he recommends pleasure: "Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth; and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart and in the sight of thine eyes." At another moment it seems wiser to be industrious: send forth your argosies, invest your money prudently, early and late be busy on the farm.¹ Make the most, then, of the present, either by enjoying yourself or by doing the day's work bravely; for old age and death are creeping on apace. He pictures in vivid metaphors the day when the bodily powers begin to fail, and that other day

"When the lamp is shattered,"²

and the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns unto God who gave it. "Vanity of vanities; all is vanity"—such was the burden of

¹ Eccles. xi. 1, 2, 6.

² xii. 3-5, 6. The silver cord and the golden bowl probably refer to a hanging lamp. So McNeile.

the Preacher's message, remarks the editor at the beginning and end of the book, summing it all up.¹

But how could such teaching as this ever find a place within the Scriptures? No wonder that for a long time after the book was written the Jewish authorities debated whether it should be admitted. In the end, however, it was allowed to enter, but not until it had undergone revision. We have noticed that while the Preacher is discoursing in his vein of despair and finding no evidence of God's work or rule in the world, a good many verses occur which say exactly the opposite; they have a marked religious sense; they are quite free from bitterness and heat. For example, to the Preacher God's work seemed to be merely the movement of an inexorable fate: but "God hath done it, that men should fear before Him"; "God shall judge the righteous and the wicked"; reverence and a punctual fulfilment of religious vows belong to man's duty towards God; so far from evil being inherent in human nature, "God made man upright."² The Preacher's counsel runs, "Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth"; against it we find the caution, "but know thou that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment." Such a warning, however, never entered the Preacher's mind, for he goes on: "and remove sorrow from thine heart, and put away evil from thy flesh: for youth and the prime of life are vanity." The dangerous doctrine is pulled up with another caution:

¹ Eccles i. 2, xii. 8.

² iii. 14, 17, v. 1-7, vii. 29.

"and remember thy Creator in the days of thy youth."¹ So we follow all through the book a string of verses, designed to serve as checks or warnings, which introduce a religious element otherwise so strangely lacking.

And besides these religious verses we discover another series, which repeat the homely wisdom and somewhat trite morality of the "wise men," whose sayings are collected in the book of Proverbs. "The fool foldeth his hands together, and eateth his own flesh"; "a good name is better than precious ointment"; "the heart of the wise is in the house of mourning, but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth."² The tone of these proverbs is wholly foreign to the unconventional and burning emotion of the Preacher's own reflections.

Now, I think we have found the clue. At least two admirers of the Preacher took his book in hand, and inserted here and there wholesome and religious remarks with the aim of correcting its unorthodox tendency. Thus safeguarded and enriched, the obvious objections to the book were overcome, and it was admitted into the canon of Scripture.

The work of the Preacher now stands out with all its haunting charm. In certain moods it appeals to us strongly; we cannot but be touched by its large

¹ Eccles. xi. 9-xii. 1; cf. further vii. 18b, 26b, viii. 5, 11-13, xii. 13, 14.

² iv. 5, vii. 1, 4; cf. further iv. 9-12, vi. 7, 9, vii. 6a, 7-12, 19, viii. 1, ix. 17, 18, x. 1-3, 8-14a, 15, 18, 19, xii. 11-12.

humanity, its fellow-feeling for the wrongs and disappointments which afflict the sons of men. It is good for us to be compelled to look at life not as it may be, but as it is, and to catch something from that honest and unflinching gaze. We easily slip into the habit of living in a world of unrealities. But we are told that the sum and substance of the Preacher's teaching came to "vanity of vanities, all is vanity." It is bitterly, grievously true if we look out upon the world and see nothing but evil triumphant and good defeated, no signs of God's presence or control, no prospect of a life beyond the present. Just think what we should be if those blessed truths by which we live were banished into darkness. We take them for granted, and our careless familiarity leads us to forget their inestimable value. For a moment imagine them to be withdrawn, and the light goes out of life. You remember how Wordsworth describes one of his "strange fits of passion"; he rode by moonlight up to the cottage where the loved one dwelt, when "at once, the bright moon dropped," and as he paused outside he thought, what if she should be dead? We turn from the unimaginable tragedy, only to thank God for the sure and certain truth. For to us the Preacher's moral, wrung from a sensitive heart groping in the dark, is profoundly untrue. We know that God whom we serve is not only the Unknowable in all His perfections, but He is Jesus Christ who entered into human life, who is a Person whom we can love and obey, who is our present Master and

Judge, in whom through the Spirit we live now and shall live hereafter. Over against the pitiful wail of "vanity of vanities" we set the word of Jesus Christ: "I am the light of the world; he that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life."

X.

THE PATH OF LIFE.

"Thou wilt shew me the path of life."—Ps. xvi. 11.

X.

THE PATH OF LIFE.

WESTWARDS out of the city of Athens runs a road, once the most famous and even now the most interesting of all the roads in Greece. It is called the Sacred Way. It passes through the ancient cemetery of the city, where the monuments of the dead are standing to this day ; it leads by gorge and wood, by shore and bay, through scenes crowded with memories, until it comes to an end at the ruined Temple of Eleusis by the sea. That Sacred Way was a path of death and a path of life. Along it used to pass mourners carrying their dead to burial, with hardly a hope for the future to cheer their grief ; along it too travelled the Athenian to worship at the Temple of Eleusis, the Temple of the Mysteries, where he would learn all that his religion could teach him about the life beyond the present. We do not know exactly what that teaching was, but we know that it was imparted only to the initiated few. For the mass of men death appeared to be an inevitable fate ; the dead were shadows flitting among shades, their existence a weary echo of this life, relieved perhaps by the pious service of kinsfolk upon earth, but for

the most part "a sorry refuge for the miserable." If now and again a brighter hope seemed to flicker up, it soon died down, and never took hold of the imagination of the people.

And yet those tombstones beside the Sacred Way represent a truly elevated view of death. On one of them is carved a family parting with the youngest son, who is taking affectionate farewell before leaving for his long home; on another, a fair lady is being tended by her handmaid as though it were only the grace of her familiar ways which was to be preserved in her memorial; hard by is a young soldier who was killed in the wars, fighting the enemy on horseback: it was the great moment of his life, and no private sorrow is allowed to mar the record of his public services. What impresses us so much in these noble sculptures is the fine reserve and dignity with which death was faced; not a trace of violence or despair is shown; the only epitaph is the word "Farewell," as though the beloved one had but taken his departure into a far country. Then as we stand among the ruins of the temple where those mysteries were held, which, we are told, brought men "peace in this life and blessed hope in the life to come," we feel the pathos of those ancient longings and beliefs, and we thank God for the life and immortality which the Gospel has brought to light.

In the Old Testament we find that there was much the same uncertainty on this subject among the Jews as there was among the Greeks, although, as we shall

see, the Old Testament saints reached a high ground for hope. Thus, to take the Psalms alone, we meet with quite opposite opinions about the future life, some Psalmists declaring that after death there is no remembrance of God, no recollection of His faithfulness and love and wonders, no possibility of giving thanks;¹ while others boldly look forward to seeing His face and to being satisfied with His likeness, trusting that God would "take" them into glory as He "took" the patriarch Enoch.² This great variety of belief shows how little there was of any fixed or settled doctrine on the subject. To the saints of the Old Testament this life was all-important; to love and serve God now was the supreme object of existence; since there was no sure revelation to guide them further, with "a trained content"³ they stopped short at death and did not care to penetrate beyond it. To them the contrast lay not between this life and the next, but between life with God and life without God.

The sixteenth Psalm, however, is one of those in which faith takes a bolder flight and pierces confidently into the unknown future—

"Thou wilt not abandon my soul to Hades;
Neither wilt Thou suffer Thy loving one to see the pit.
Thou wilt shew me the path of life;
In Thy presence is fulness of joy;
In Thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore."

¹ Ps. vi. 5, lxxxviii. 10-12, cxv. 17.

² Ps. xvii. 15, xlix. 15, lxxiii. 24; Gen. v. 24.

³ Mozley, *Lectures and other Theological Papers*, p. 49.

Now what was the ground of the Psalmist's confidence? It was just this: his profound and vivid sense of fellowship with God. He has made God his all in all:

"I have said unto Jehovah, Thou art my Lord;
I have no good beyond thee."

As in the olden days the fathers received their allotted portion in the land of promise, so he has received Jehovah as his portion:

"The Lord is the portion of my inheritance and my cup."

"My cup"—that brimming chalice which quenches my thirst for God, which satisfies all my longings, and gives me to drink of the torrents of His pleasures!

It is precisely this fellowship with God, the source of the Psalmist's happiness in life, which is the secret of his hope for the future. It cannot be that this supreme reality is merely a passing emotion or a deceptive dream. No! he has won fellowship with God, with Him who is eternally, whose mercies fail not, whose ways are everlasting. He cannot imagine that this fellowship will be cut off by death; nothing can separate him from God; God will make clear to him the pathway to life; he can look forward hopefully to the fulness of joy and pleasures for evermore.

"Therefore my heart is glad, my glory rejoiceth;
My flesh also doth rest securely."

Thus the Sacred Way which led the Psalmist to a belief in a future life was his keen sense of the relation in which he stood to God. It was the master-principle of his life; in the strength of it he was able to walk consistently amid temptation, loving the good and hating the evil; it made his heart sing with inward joy; he had found the clue to the mysteries beyond! In the New Testament this Psalm is applied to Christ, and is regarded as fulfilled in Him. Through Jesus Christ the fellowship of man with God becomes complete. He sends us His Spirit that we may dwell in Him and He in us. Our union with Christ is the very basis of our immortal life, which is founded and built up on this. God shows us the true pathway to life; and as we tread it we find the joy which no man taketh from us, we possess the hope which leadeth to eternal life.

Thus the Christian doctrine makes clear what the Old Testament saints could only guess at, or now and again, as in our Psalm, insist on by a bold effort of faith. The union of each of us with the Blessed Lord is not a reward laid up for us in the future, it is the supreme reality of the present. The result of it is to endow the present with an eternal significance, and to make our life now all of a piece with the life to come. In the New Testament you will find that immortality, resurrection, judgment are brought into close concern with our life in the present, because they are all involved in our life of fellowship with Christ. It is not a question of time, or of the divisions of time.

The Christian's life of fellowship with God is one living whole, moving through various changes towards its final perfection.

You see, then, how vital it is to cultivate and strengthen our fellowship with God in Christ. Of course we must pray; but we must take far more pains with our prayers that we are accustomed to take. Jesus Christ Himself has ordained a means by which we may hold communion with God; we cannot expect to lead Christian lives without doing what Christ has declared to be essential. And then, in order to cultivate this sense of fellowship with God, those who have the best right to speak recommend us to form the habit of constantly remembering God's presence as we go about our daily tasks. To a reverent mind the common things of life may become sacraments, the outward signs of the invisible presence. If we take the simple duty of the day, no matter how humble or how high, as an opportunity for asking God to help us, if we try to do it as far as possible simply as an act of love and service to Him, we shall learn to live in union with God.

And in this way we face the great mystery of life and death and the life to come. The Psalmist discovered the secret; for he realized that his fellowship with God could never end, and he dared to build his joy and peace of mind on this. To us Jesus Christ has revealed the truth more clearly. United to Him we take the trials of life with a good courage; with Him as our all in all we learn to love the good

and hate the evil, and to deal hopefully with the sin that doth so easily beset us. So far as we are in Christ our eternal life is begun already; we can face death when it comes with humble and steadfast hope; we are one with Him who triumphed over death, and we too shall rise, rise to new life.

The Path of Life! It is not like that Sacred Way of ancient Greece which leads to the ruined temple. The Psalmist found it; and God shows it to us in a way that the Psalmist never knew. "Truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ." "God gave unto us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He that hath the Son hath the life."

XI.

THE SONG OF THE SHEPHERD.

“The Lord is my Shepherd”—Ps. 23.

XI.

THE SONG OF THE SHEPHERD.

WE must think of the bare, hot hills of Palestine. They furnish but a scanty pasturage for the wandering flocks of sheep; the very name for *pasture* in the Bible generally means *wilderness*. We must banish from our minds the green fields of our country, enclosed with hedges or stone walls. In the East the barren uplands are all open and unfenced; and you never see a flock of sheep without the shepherd in charge of them. Everything depends upon the shepherd; he has to find out where the thin grass lurks beneath the rocks, where the precious fountain bubbles into the cistern, where shelter may be had from the scorching sun at noonday. Then there are dangers of all kinds to be faced. The flock must be driven cautiously down the sides of the dark ravine, where a single slip means death; there are robbers, too, and wild beasts on the watch for prey. The life of the shepherd has its perils and anxieties; everything depends upon his vigilance, courage, and resource; without the shepherd the sheep must be scattered. The Psalmist knew well what the life meant; and when he wanted to express some of

the simplest and deepest truths about God and His dealings with us, he used the figure of shepherd and sheep.

1. He speaks of himself and his fellow-believers as belonging to Jehovah's flock. Under the strong protection of the Heavenly Shepherd the sheep have all they want: "all the simple pleasures which make up life, the freshness of the meadow, the coolness of the stream." "He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: He leadeth me beside the still waters." It is a picture of peaceful happiness, of the sort of happiness which the pure and simple-hearted possess, and all of us long for in some way or other. "It represents that Heaven which is everywhere if we could but enter it, and yet almost nowhere because so few of us can."¹ "He restoreth my soul," He grants me all needful refreshment.

2. But He does more than this. The flock cannot always be lying in "pastures of young grass" and enjoying "waters of rest." There are journeys to be taken, temptations to be mastered, duties to be done. The shepherd knows this too: "He guideth me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake." "Paths of righteousness" mean paths which lead in the right direction, the straight ways which go where God directs, which lead us along the lines of His will and purpose, and bring us at last to the steps of His throne, the joys of His countenance, the reward of His right hand. He has pledged His

¹ *Ecc Homo*, p. 6.

name; He has told us what He is. Hath He said, and will He not do it? "For His name's sake" He will guide us as we need.

3. There is one journey which all of us must take. It carries us into that dark ravine, "the valley of the shadow of death." But as in life so too in death, my Guide and Protector is with me: "I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me: Thy rod and Thy staff, they comfort me." Oh the blessedness to have in that hour a rod for defence, a staff to lean upon! For then mere earthly helps must be abandoned, and even the love of our dearest cannot avail us. "I shall die alone," said the French philosopher: it is very true. Alone, and yet not alone; for God is with me. He has never left me all my life, He will not leave me then; I shall pass the valley with His presence at my side!

4. Meanwhile the path is difficult, infested with enemies of all kinds eager for our ruin. Not merely outward enemies, bad men and bad examples, but inward enemies as well, doubts and fears, terrible temptations of flesh and spirit, our own bad selves which try to get the better of us; fightings within and fears without. God have mercy upon us! How does He help us here? He gives us the food of His grace, the sacrament of His own indwelling life, to strengthen us against the assaults of evil. He gives us, too, the spirit of inward joy which is the best spirit in which to meet the fears and difficulties of life. "Thou preparest a table before me in the

presence of mine enemies : thou anointest my head with oil, my cup runneth over." Such are the good things which God has prepared for them that love Him ! A feast is spread, a table furnished. God is our host and we are His guests ; we taste His inexhaustible delights ; there is "the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness," and the overflowing cup of new and richer life. The enemies we dreaded look on and cannot share the feast, "the desire of the ungodly shall perish."

5. There is yet a higher joy, a more blessed prospect. "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life : and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever." Goodness and mercy shall follow me. Man's life is not merely a search, it is a being searched. We make great efforts to follow after God, if haply we may find Him ; we hope, we long, we struggle ; but all the time the pursuit is on the other side, we are being followed. God is beforehand with us ; He Himself is hoping, longing, struggling for us. God's mercy and goodness are engaged in the pursuit. It is not I who apprehend, "I am apprehended of Christ,"¹ as St. Paul says.

"Let me no more my comfort draw
From my frail hold of Thee,—
In this alone rejoice with awe ;
Thy mighty grasp of me."

And then, at last, after the strong protection of my Shepherd has led me to the pastures and the

¹ Phil. iii. 12.

fountains, has guided me along the paths of the divine will, has journeyed by my side through the gloom and terror of the valley; when I taste and see that the Lord is gracious; when goodness and mercy have sought me and found me, and worked their work in me, then, as the glorious climax of all, "I shall dwell in the house of the Lord for ever." It is not the earthly sanctuary where I worshipped and felt God near; its boundaries are not fixed in space, its duration is not limited by time; for it is the house where I shall dwell *for ever*, the house not made with hands, eternal, in the heavens. This is the glorious end of the faithful servant. "In Thy presence is the fulness of joy: in Thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore."

So, in language which all can understand, the Psalmist gave expression to the faith which has fortified God's people ever since. "The Lord is my shepherd." For us the touching figure has gained a new depth of meaning. Jesus Christ adopted it, and used it of Himself and His disciples. "I am the good shepherd, and I know Mine own, and Mine own know me; . . . and I lay down My life for the sheep." The Psalm has received its full interpretation. Jesus is the Shepherd. He shared with His flock all their sufferings and hardships; He passed through the valley, and there overcame death, and we know "that He which raised up the Lord Jesus shall raise up us also with Jesus;"¹ He

¹ 2 Cor. iv. 14.

Himself provides the feast of His own Body and Blood; goodness and mercy Himself, He came to seek and to save that which was lost; and He has prepared a mansion for His redeemed where they shall dwell with Him for ever; where "the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall be their shepherd, and shall guide them unto fountains of waters of life."¹

¹ Rev. vii. 17.

XII.

THE FIRST CHAPTER OF GENESIS.

“And God saw every thing that He had made, and, behold, it was very good.”—GEN. i. 31.

XII.

THE FIRST CHAPTER OF GENESIS.

EACH time that we listen to the first chapter of Genesis we are more and more impressed by its majestic simplicity and its sublime religious feeling. In language which is intelligible to a child it describes one of the deepest mysteries, the origin of the world and of man. From one point of view the narrative may be said to belong to the childhood of the race; while from another it is found to satisfy the maturest spiritual reflection. Starting with a state of chaos, brooded over by the spirit of God, the earth is gradually ordered, stage by stage, to become a dwelling-place for mankind. The creative work of God advances from lower to higher until it reaches its climax in the creation of man, formed in the image of God. The different stages, together with God's rest at the close, are fitted into the seven days of the week. It is all symmetrical and complete; the divine will was accomplished: "God saw everything that He had made, and, behold, it was very good."

Now there are two reasons which make it important for us to gain some understanding of Genesis i.: first,

because it teaches us a profound religious truth which holds good for all time; and second, because this chapter, which stands at the beginning of the Bible, acts as a stumbling-block to many people. How are we to reconcile what the Bible teaches about creation with the teaching of natural science? If this is what we have to believe, we must throw the Bible over, for we cannot unlearn the facts which science makes certain. We all know the difficulty; it is best to face it frankly.

Let us take the first point: What is the religious teaching of the first chapter of Genesis? We learn from it that the world did not come into existence of itself, but by the will of God. Before all created things is God eternal. We go back to the very beginning and we come to God. We may pursue the presence of life down to the minutest throb of the lowest germ, and we arrive at a point when we are driven to admit that some cause must have produced it; the Bible says, the Cause is God. It tells us that a personal Being, a personal intelligence and will, exists eternally and is First, the Source of all life and of all created things. It sets God above the vast and subtle movements, changes, and forms of life which are present in the universe. "Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever the earth and the world were made, Thou art God from everlasting."

Again, the first chapter of Genesis describes the work of creation as taking place in six days, that is

to say, in an orderly manner befitting the supreme Wisdom. The particular creations enumerated represent those visible features of the universe which have always impressed the minds of men, the sky, the dry land, the sea, the trees, the great lights, the animals. Details are not mentioned; only the most typical forms are singled out: and what we are taught about them is that all these various parts of the creation are not the outcome of mechanical forces, but products of the will of God. "And God said" opens the work of each day—a word of God expressing His intention; and at the end of each day's work follows the statement, "and it was so"—the divine purpose was fulfilled. "God saw that it was good." Each work corresponded with what God intended it to be, perfect so far as its nature required, the object of the Creator's approving regard. So we learn that while God is set far above all the life of the world, He is at the same time closely concerned with each work of His hands. Each several part of the universe owns a relation to its Creator.

And then, as the climax of creation, comes man, pre-eminent over all the rest. With marked solemnity of language the Bible tells us that God created man in His own image, after His likeness. The Bible does not stand alone in this; the idea of likeness between God and man meets us in other ancient literatures, and in a crude form it is found in Babylonian mythology. Probably if we knew what was in the mind of the writer of those noble verses, Gen.

i. 26 and 27, we should be surprised by the primitive simplicity of his conception. Most likely he thought of God as possessed of a body rather than as a purely spiritual Being, and of the "image" after which God created man as a corporeal image. But the words contain a profounder truth than lay within the writer's range, and we have a right to interpret them in their highest rather than in their lowest sense. The fact that man was created in the image of God distinguishes him from the animals and gives him dominion over them: so much the narrative itself implies. But we can go further. Whatever may have been the origin of his physical frame, man on the spiritual side of him bears a likeness to the divine nature. He has the faculty for knowing God and for entering into communion with Him. He can will and reason; he possesses the creative gift which endows him with mastery over matter; he can rise above his lower senses, unite himself with his fellow-men, serve them, sacrifice himself for them. God has, in fact, bestowed upon man certain powers and qualities which, in an immeasurably higher degree, He Himself possesses. This is the meaning of the lofty truth that man is made in the image of God. "Thou madest him to lack but little of God," sings the Psalmist, "to crown him with glory and worship. Thou makest him to have dominion of the works of Thy hands: Thou hast put all things in subjection under his feet."¹

And now let us turn to the other question which

¹ Ps. viii.

we proposed: how are we to reconcile the Biblical account of creation with the truths of natural science? For example, geology proves that the world is vastly older than the Bible implies; there were no clearly distinct "days" during which the different parts of the creation came into existence. The order of creation in Genesis i. is impossible: instead of vegetation being complete two days before animal life appeared, we have sure evidence that vegetation and animal life appear together, animals even rather earlier than vegetation, and that they continue side by side. Genesis declares that fishes and birds were created together; the truth being that birds make their appearance long after fishes. The science of astronomy is equally opposed to what the Bible says about the creation of light, and of the sun, moon, and stars. That the earth should have emerged with vegetation, grass, and trees, before the sun and the other heavenly bodies, is absolutely incredible; all our knowledge of the sun and earth excludes such a thing. Any schoolboy finds these elementary facts of scientific truth in his text-book. I will only mention one further point. In Gen. i. 29 and 30 it is expressly provided that man and all the animals are to live upon vegetable food; but such a condition of life can never have existed; long before the appearance of man the animals preyed upon one another, as the structure of their remains makes certain. What the writer of these verses gives us is an ideal; the taking of animal life for food seemed to him a breach of the

divine order ; he pictured a primæval state of harmless and peaceable existence.

What are we to say to all this ? Knowledge has advanced, and the old world of primitive imagination has disappeared in the new light ; the story of the creation in Genesis no longer satisfies us as a credible account of the matter. Attempts have been made to twist and force the plain meaning of the sacred text into some sort of agreement with the facts of science, and the result is that the Bible falls into discredit and the whole system of which it forms a part. To the question, can the first chapter of Genesis be reconciled with science ? honesty and common sense bid us answer, No ! It is sometimes imagined that the account of the creation is an essential part of the Christian faith ; most emphatically I would say, this is not the case. The Church has never committed itself to any explanation of the way in which the world was created, or of the way in which the narrative in Genesis is to be understood. Every Christian is at liberty to understand it in the sense which natural science will permit. We are perfectly free, therefore ; but let us be quite clear that we do understand what is the purpose of Genesis. It is *not* to anticipate the discoveries of science, or to give us information on points of scientific fact ; its purpose is to impress the profound, eternal truth that God made the world, that it stands in closest relation to Him, and that man is made in God's image, after His likeness. Science cannot, and does not profess to teach

us this; and Genesis does not need to be forced into teaching what it does not profess to teach. The Bible narrative must be read in the light of the age when it was written; the form of the narrative belongs to that age: but the spiritual truth which it conveys can never lose its sublimity and freshness. Before and behind the world as we see it, there is God, all-mighty, all-good, eternal; and we men are in a measure partakers of His divine nature; we can know Him, and love Him, and obey Him. We have indeed come grievously short of God's will and purpose; but He who in the beginning created all things, recreates us afresh through His Son Jesus Christ, and makes us fit to rise to the height of the divine intention, and to inhabit the new heavens and the new earth.

XIII.
PROMISE AND FULFILMENT.

“These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.”
—HEB. xi. 13.

XIII.

PROMISE AND FULFILMENT.

PRECIOUS for many reasons, the Epistle to the Hebrews is particularly precious for this: it shows us how to interpret the Old Testament. What can be more illuminating than the way in which the whole course of the ancient history is conjured up before our minds in the eleventh chapter? What an insight into the true significance of the old heroic days! What a grasp of the essentials! What imaginative, human-hearted sympathy! The writer has caught the secret which explains the whole story. As the figures of the Old Testament saints pass across the scene, in spite of their differences of character and experience, one common bond is found to unite them all, one great conviction to inspire their lives; it is this. They were all convinced that God had a high purpose for their race, and that they themselves were helping forward the fulfilment of this purpose; they had God's promise which gave them the assurance; and so while they lived lives of strenuous effort, and, in some cases, of painful witness, they were all the time living and working for the great days that were to come. They looked beyond the passing

moment; they were men of ideals; they were men of faith.

Take Abraham, for example, as interpreted for us in this Epistle: God called him, and he left his home and kindred and wandered into a strange country. God promised that the strange country should one day belong to him and his descendants, but the fulfilment of the promise lay in the distant future. So Abraham never made for himself a settled home; he lived in tents with his heir and his children, moving from well to well, from the shelter of one holy tree to another; and then, perhaps on some quiet evening as the sun went down in splendour and lit up the battlemented clouds, he would stand at his tent door and see far off in vision the glorious outline of the city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God. So he would greet the vision of the promise fulfilled; he would shut his eyes and clasp it to his heart. There stood the heavenly city, but it was not open to him yet; for ages to come he and his must be strangers and pilgrims; the abiding home, the city of God, was not yet ready, but yonder it lay in the steadfast counsel of God.

At last the vision which the saints of old had greeted from afar was realized and the promise fulfilled. Observe that God had prepared for them a city; that was the reward of faith. Not a mansion for each one by himself, but a city where many dwell together and live a common life of brotherhood and service. The reward was not individual, then, but

social : it is the Christian society, the Body of Christ, the communion of saints !

Our text is often misunderstood and wrongly applied. "Strangers and pilgrims on the earth." How often we are told that our home is not here, that we are travellers on the road, lodging at a wayside inn, not inhabiting a permanent dwelling-place. This may be true, but it is not the truth to be found in our text. Abraham and the patriarchs could confess that they were strangers and pilgrims upon the earth ; but the whole point of the writer of this Epistle is that we Christians need no longer use such language ; we are not wanderers without a habitation ; we need not greet the promises from afar ; for the promises have been fulfilled ; that which prophets and kings desired to see we have seen ; the city which hath foundations is here, and we have entered into it. Thus the writer says : "Ye are come . . . unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem." And St. Paul's language is to the same effect : "So then ye are no more strangers and sojourners, but ye are fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God, being built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner-stone."¹ And you remember how the book of Revelation describes the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming out of heaven from God : it is the Christian Church as she is now and always ; and each member who overcomes shall receive the badge

¹ Eph. ii. 19, 20.

and sign of citizenship, "The name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, written upon him."

From all this it is clear that "strangers and pilgrims upon the earth" is exactly what we are *not*; such words were true on the lips of Abraham, but "God has provided some better thing concerning us." We are not wandering in search of a home, we have found one; we are not looking for the city which hath the foundations, we are living in it. God's own society, the Body of Christ, the fellowship of the saints, the eternal order—we are part of it even now, we belong to it, our home, our citizenship is in the heavenly city now. Nevertheless the city is not yet established in all its glory and triumph; a brighter glory, a fuller triumph is still in the future; and so this same Epistle to the Hebrews can say, "we have not here an abiding city, but we seek after the city which is to come." It is the other side of the truth. We have already entered the kingdom of God, and yet we are told to pray "Thy kingdom come."

If we are merely strangers and pilgrims on the earth, we may well ask, how can we throw ourselves with our whole hearts into the duties, the work, the many interests of life? Surely God has given us these. Of course He has; we are not intended to live in the present with our hearts in the future. Putting together the whole truth as we find it stated in its various aspects in the Bible, we arrive at this splendid and uplifting teaching of the New Testament.

As Christians we are members of a divine society, sometimes called the Body of Christ, sometimes the Church, sometimes the city of God or the new Jerusalem. As members of a society our whole life is shared with others ; no one can realize his highest life or any future blessedness apart from the life and the blessedness of the whole society. And this social life of the Christian brotherhood is already eternal ; it belongs to the divine order ; it is lived in union with Christ. This present life, therefore, and the life to come are organically one ; it is not a question of living now in a half-hearted way in view of the true life which is to come ; but it is living now in eternity, with a seriousness and a dignity befitting our immortal life ; doing our work, living the life of brotherhood, seeking the welfare of the whole, because all the time we are citizens of God's city, and we draw our strength, our inspiration, and our hope from the living Christ, who makes us His dwelling-place, the abode of His eternal Spirit.

XIV.
THE GREAT COMMANDMENT.

“Master, which is the great commandment?”—ST. MATT.
xxii. 36.

XIV.

THE GREAT COMMANDMENT.¹

WE are still asking the question. What is the supreme rule for human life? What are we to take for our aim? Where are we to find the master-principle? The difficulty lies not in the lack of an answer to our question, but in the very abundance of the answers. One of the best things that Oxford does for us is to open our eyes to the variety of the interests which call for our allegiance. The man who makes the most of his time in Oxford is the man who "through that glory sees new worlds foreshown, And hears high songs, and triumphs yet to come."

For the first time in our lives, perhaps, we are brought into contact with real knowledge; we begin to have some glimmering of what it means to know; we drink eagerly of the fountain, and we rise still thirsty. Nothing seems more admirable than the life devoted to mastering some part of the truth. Is this the great commandment for me?

Or again we are drawn to take an interest in the

¹ Preached in St. John's College Chapel, Oxford.

problems of the day, the problems of our great cities and industries, of social reform. They appeal to us strongly, they kindle into flame all that is most chivalrous and brotherly in our nature. It is a stirring thing to live in times like these; and our philosophy, and our religion as it is now taught, give us a message, a hope, which we can hand on and use for the good of our brother men. Here is another of the great causes: shall I make it mine?

And then from time to time in Oxford we hear those searching calls which come to us from distant lands, claiming our manhood and our faith for the service of God in India, in Africa, in our colonies. These calls come from the very heart of our religion, and we know it; for religion advances by awaking the heroic which slumbers in every man's breast. Is this the great commandment for me?

We feel the attraction of all these aims, and of others like them, and we are swayed, perhaps, by each in turn. Meanwhile we have to find an answer to the question in the Gospel. For most of us, I fancy, the question takes some such form as this: which is the higher, the worthier aim in life, self-development or self-restraint? Which is the law I am to obey: am I to perfect myself or am I to deny myself?

Obviously, self-development is one of the chief reasons why we are here at all. We want to think clearly, to learn how to take an intelligent, balanced view of things as educated men; we wish to make

ourselves, both in mind and body, efficient for the work of life. We set before ourselves the aim of knowing the best things in art, in literature, in human experience; and so we hope to become cultivated men in every sense. It is a thoroughly wholesome and worthy aim: it has the sanction of religion, for did not the Master Himself bid us "be ye perfect," *i.e.* full-grown, with every faculty of our being fully developed? And yet we know that this is not the great commandment; it will not do as the chief principle to govern our lives. Our reading has made us familiar with the Hellenic type; perhaps we may remember what Heine and Matthew Arnold have written on the subject. For all its brilliant sanity and its attractive products the Hellenic type was deficient on its moral side. As an aim for life, self-development or self-culture is not sufficient: again and again it has proved itself inadequate; history is full of instances of its failure.

So we turn to the other ideal or aim, that of self-restraint or self-conquest. The men who have been true to it, men of what has been called the Hebraic type, are those who have quickened and purified the life of the race. They are the men, saints and martyrs many of them, who have heard voices calling for great surrenders or great sacrifices; they heard and answered with all they had. From the earliest days Christianity has upheld this as one of the great laws of true Christian living; we

must deny ourselves and take up the Cross if we would follow the Master. Some of you may have heard or read those stirring words which the Bishop of Bombay spoke to us in Oxford on the eve of his departure for India. He applied in a bold, even startling way, those solemn, familiar words of Christ: "He took the bread and brake it." And what Christ did with His life, we must do with ours, said the preacher. It was the Christian plea put in its intensest form, and we were all the better for having had it brought home to us.

And here is Lent just upon us, reminding us of what we are so glad to forget, that we have sins to repent of and temptations to overcome, and that the service of Christ demands something more than the cultivation of our best selves or the glad pursuit of things pure and lovely and of good report. We have to subdue the flesh to the spirit, and to conquer our lower selves. But is this the great commandment? Is the law of self-denial the main principle which is to govern our lives? We found that the other ideal or aim has its weak points; it is weak on the moral side. And it would not be difficult to discover weak points in this rival aim; on the intellectual side, for instance, it may be shown to be narrow or imperfect in its outlook. It cannot be the true and sovereign law for human life; for the all-round man is he who aims at both, who, while perfecting himself and making the most of all his opportunities for self-development, yet practises

systematic self-denial, and responds loyally to the call of duty, conscience, and moral effort.

As ends in themselves, therefore, as sovereign laws for life, we can take neither the one nor the other. Neither self-development nor self-restraint will really do for our governing principle. So we ask once more, Master, which is the great commandment? And what does the Master say? His answer goes to the root of the matter. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and thy neighbour as thyself." Nothing here about self-culture or self-conquest, but something really fundamental, the true aim, the sovereign law!

To love God with every faculty we have, intellect, affections, moral will, this must come first. And loving God in this way we shall inevitably love the perfect Truth, the perfect Beauty, the perfect Goodness in all their manifestations; and loving God with an absorbing devotion of all our powers, we shall inevitably grow more and more like Him ourselves, and attain the full perfection of our nature; and for His sake we shall try to root out and expel everything that is contrary to His love, those things in us which grieve Him and injure the harmony of lover and beloved. Thus we find the true motive for self-development and self-denial; we will aim at them not as ends in themselves, but out of our love of God.

To love God and to love our neighbour as ourselves: the great commandment has its necessary appendix.

If we have in any degree found out what true love means, we have found this, that it means sacrifice, a continual surrender of our preferences or our comforts or our ease of mind for the sake of another. Self-denial, then, is not a thing to aim at as an end in itself; it is merely the most obvious way of proving our love to one another. To help any one to live more according to God's commandments, to help any one to know more truly the love of the Lord Jesus Christ, to help any one to fight the battle with evil; what better way can we find to prove the genuine quality of our love?

You want a practical aim to keep before you during the coming season of Lent: here it is. This is the great commandment. Try to obey it as you have never done before; carry it out in detail every day; and ask God to help you to be true to the high aim and purpose which He has set before us, His sons.

XV.
DISCIPLE AND MASTER.

“Thomas saith unto him, Lord, we know not whither Thou
goest ; how know we the way ?”—ST. JOHN xiv. 5.

XV.

DISCIPLE AND MASTER.

IT was a very natural question to ask. The Master had just spoken words which the anxious disciples took to mean that He was leaving them: "Whither I go ye cannot come," "I go to prepare a place for you." They felt baffled and dismayed; the Master entered lovingly into their feelings; "Let not your heart be troubled," He said.

And behind this question of St. Thomas there lay that devoted personal attachment to the Master which had led him once to cry out to his fellow-disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with Him." There was no doubt about the ardent loyalty of the disciple; his whole heart was with his Lord; he had left all to follow Him; and this made the mysterious words which spoke of a new departure, of a change in the familiar, blessed intercourse, so painful, so bewildering. But it was all a part of the Master's considerate training. He was preparing them for what was to come. Instead of following Him along the familiar paths of Galilee and Decapolis they were to follow Him in a new way; there was to be a change in the

manner of His presence with them ; He would indeed still be with them, but not visibly ; His presence would be spiritual, and therefore, He would have them understand, all the more real. Accordingly He made a fresh demand upon their faith : " ye believe in God, believe also in Me." It was an appeal for more entire self-committal, for a proof of loyalty not claimed before, for a quickened apprehension of spiritual realities grounded upon all that He had taught them in the past. So far they had followed Him, but they must go farther ; their faith, their devoted attachment, must carry them into a higher region, " that where I am there ye may be also." In fact the Master clearly desired to lift the whole level of their discipleship and to carry it on to a new stage. At first they could not understand ; this claim struck dismay and uncertainty into their hearts ; how were they to follow Him along this new way ? It was very natural, it argued no want of loyal affection, that St. Thomas should exclaim, " Lord, we know not whither thou goest ; how know we the way ? "

So we are inclined to ask when the Master lays a fresh claim upon our discipleship. Both in the life of the Church and in the life of the individual disciple Christ is continually seeking to lead us on a stage farther and to raise the whole level of our service. He makes a fresh appeal to our faith, calling upon us to enter bravely into changed conditions, to deal with new problems, to adapt our past experience to more searching tests of our loyalty and insight. And it is

not always clear at first whither He would lead us, what His way is.

There are the problems familiar to all of us who are engaged in the practical work of the Church, problems which weigh heaviest upon those whom God has called to the task of government in the Church of Christ; how is fresh life to be put into the whole body so as to raise it to the highest state of efficiency, and secure that all members of the Church, clergy and laity alike, shall take a responsible and effective share in the promotion of her highest interests? How are we to reach those who ought to belong to us and do not? How are we most wisely to encourage the growth of unity among Christians, and while remaining true to our own historical connexions at the same time maintain our loyalty to our catholic heritage which surmounts the barriers of race and country? Whither wouldest Thou have us follow, O Lord? Show us Thy way!

More difficult, perhaps, because more subtle and elusive, are the problems connected with the teaching of the Faith, and the fresh understanding of it in the light of new knowledge and altered habits of thought. The Truth remains; but each age discovers new aspects of it, and has to re-interpret it so as to meet the needs of the age; the new wine must be put into new bottles. This is our task, and a very anxious one it is. The standards of the Faith, and the sacred books to which the Church appeals to verify what she teaches, are being severely tested, with the result that

we find much to unlearn, much, perhaps, to learn afresh. Faithful souls are disturbed and grieved, and feel themselves adrift from the familiar moorings. Nevertheless, the activity of the critical spirit has always been a proof that the Church is morally and spiritually alive. An implicit confidence in all truth will be our safest guide; let us above all things dread lest by our narrowness or self-confidence we should wilfully shut our eyes to any fragment of the truth. At the same time there are grave dangers to be faced; people are only too ready to pick up their doubts at second hand, impatient of the disciplined effort which is required for fruitful research; while the acceptance of a revelation, of something done for us which we can only understand in part, involves an attitude of obedience and humility which the temper of the age dislikes.¹ In the presence of these dangers and difficulties, again we cry, Whither goest Thou, O Lord? Show us Thy Truth!

And then there is the perpetual obligation to carry out in practice the principles of the Christian code of morals, an obligation which makes the fullest demands upon our courage, and wisdom, and faithfulness. It is no easy matter to know how to live out the Christian life practically, the kind of life which ought to be the outcome of our belief in the Incarnation. A fresh demand is made upon the reality of our discipleship; we have to make our protest against the coarse materialism which ignores and tries to evade the claim

¹ Illingworth, *Christian Character*, p. 196.

of things unseen : we have to show ourselves the enemies of wrong and oppression ; to speak a clear, strong word about plain honesty in trade and politics ; to deal intelligently, firmly, with the intemperance and uncleanness which scourge our country. In a world which crucified Christ the followers of the Cross cannot expect an easy life. Whither goest Thou, O Lord ? Show us how to live !

The disciple's question was natural ; it argued no want of loyalty ; and the Master answered it with one of His greatest and deepest sayings : " I am the way, the truth, and the life." In leading His disciples on to a higher level of discipleship He would lead them to Himself. He does more than show us the way in which we are to follow : " not only after His example, not only in His footsteps, must we find the way, but in union with Himself, and in Himself."¹ It is the same with the Truth and the Life. Thus He brings us to the very heart of the matter ; the essence of true discipleship and of all religion is to be found in union with God. It is the secret which St. Paul discloses as well as St. John : " Christ liveth in me," " Christ in you." Thus our anxious questionings receive an answer ; the summons to a fresh venture of faith, to a larger sacrifice, to graver responsibilities, is accompanied by the revelation of Jesus Christ, God and Man, as the Way, the Truth, and the Life. To take Christ for our all in all, to make His will our will, to dwell in Him and He in us, this is the beginning

¹ Paget, *Christ the Way*, p. 11.

and the end; this is the only source of the guidance, the wisdom, the strength we need to face our difficulties and tasks. Let us seek what we need so sorely from Him. "Let not him who seeks cease until he finds, and when he finds he shall be astonished, and being astonished he shall reign, and reigning he shall rest." Such is the beautiful saying, familiar to students of early Christian literature,¹ which has lately reappeared in the newly discovered sayings of Jesus; and it is significant that it occurs in a collection of sayings specially addressed to St. Thomas.

Thus in the midst of our solemnity to-day, when in response to faith, and in observance of apostolic order, the Holy Spirit is about to bestow His enabling gift with the laying on of apostolic hands, the question of St. Thomas and the answer he received lead us direct to the great essentials; guided, instructed, strengthened by Him who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life, our brother will go forth to exercise his high office for the edifying and well-governing of the Church.² The Master, the Divine Head of the Church, is present claiming a higher service of His disciple, and at the same time He reveals Himself to anxious questionings, and to loyal but self-distrustful faith, as the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

¹ Clem. Alex., *Strom.*, v. 4, § 97.

² Preached at the Consecration of the Bishop of Moray.

XVI.
ETERNAL LIFE.

“What shall I do to inherit eternal life?”—ST. LUKE x. 25.

XVI.

ETERNAL LIFE.

IT is, perhaps, the most serious question that can be asked. What is eternal life? Can there be an eternal life for me? On the answer depends not merely our hope for the future, but our whole conduct and peace of mind in the present.

The Gospel says that "a certain lawyer stood up and tempted" Christ; the words do not imply that the lawyer had any sinister motive; "tempted" means "tried"; he wanted to try our Lord's capacity as a teacher. And our Lord at once admitted the gravity of the question. He did not answer it in the way which the lawyer expected, but, as He always did, He lifted the problem to a higher level and led the questioner up to a great principle. "What is written in the law? how readest thou?" The lawyer's answer is most remarkable; it shows that he had read the law to some purpose. "He answering said, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself." Observe that our Lord brought out what the lawyer knew already; He was dealing not with an outsider,

not with an ignorant, untaught unbeliever, but with one of the faithful, a religious and estimable man. Our Lord bids him act up to the principles which he professed, and guides him to the right answer. The lawyer had got to the root of the matter. "Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live."

Here, then, is the truth which we are in search of, sanctioned by the Truth Himself. We live in the real sense, we have eternal life, by loving God and our neighbour. Let us think what this means.

In the first place, we live, we inherit eternal life, by loving God. What heights and depths are to be found in those simple words! Loving God means responding to His eternal love for us. There it has been, stored up and ready, before we were born; and ever since we came into the world it has been devoted to us, watching, caring, guiding—the love of God! Our whole joy and blessedness consists in returning this love. You have often noticed how some quiet pool or lake among the mountains gives back the image of the sky above and the hills and trees around it; so when we love God our souls reflect and answer to His changeless love for us. And when we heartily respond to God's love, we are simply giving up our whole selves to Him, heart, soul, strength, and mind; so that we become entirely His; we belong to Him who is eternal; in fact, we enter eternal life. "He that loseth his soul for My sake shall find it," by giving it away from self to God.

And in this way, by loving God and giving ourselves up to Him, we learn to know Him. He becomes the Great Companion of our lives; we feel His presence continually with us; our thoughts naturally fly to Him in moments of leisure or when we are alone. There are two picturesque expressions in the Old Testament which are used to describe this habit of living close to God; the patriarchs, we are told, "walked with God"; and Elijah, who said little but did much, was fond of saying this, "the Lord God of hosts, before whom I stand." Thus we learn to know God, to know something of what He is, and what His holy will requires of us, and what His grace and power are doing in the souls of men and in the universe of created things. I need not explain to you that we never really know a person until we love him or her. That, I think, is the natural and usual order; we begin by loving God, and so we learn to know Him. And to know God is eternal life; as our Lord Himself has taught us: "This is life eternal, that they may know Thee the only true God, and Him whom thou didst send, even Jesus Christ."

There is the second part of the answer to the great question: to inherit eternal life, to live in the true sense, we must love our neighbour as ourselves. The lawyer went deep when he put the love of our neighbour along with the love of God as the way by which we inherit eternal life. At first we may wonder why it should be so; but when we think it over the reason comes out clearly enough.

We cannot live in the true sense as solitary individuals, by shutting ourselves up and caring for nobody but our own precious selves ; it is as members of a community, a brotherhood, a church, that we live in the noble and worthy way, at the highest which we are able to reach. In several parts of the country there still lingers the tradition of the ancient hermit who spent his days in a cave among the high woods, that he might be quit of the wicked world and alone with God. But Christianity has never adopted that ideal, however attractive to holy minds in the old, rough days, as the true standard of Christian living. We are only at our best, we live in the true sense, when we have others to live for, when we shoulder on cheerfully our share of the common burden, when we discover, not without tears, that love is but another name for sacrifice. Hereafter, when the truth is known, it will be found that the brilliant qualities or striking deeds which won the praise of men are strangely overlooked ; but the act of kindness, the self-forgetful thought, the influence of a pure and simple life, these have been treasured in God's memory ; they have not perished ; they have been taken up into the heart of Christ.

If there is one thing more than another which marks the true disciple it is love of one's neighbour. I do not mean easy good-nature, for this is largely a matter of temperament ; I mean something which costs us much trouble and deliberate painstaking, an entirely practical and homely affair.

Let us remember that law of human nature which is so solemnly referred to in the Gospel, that the way in which we think and speak about others is a measure of the way in which others think and speak about us. Let us believe all the good we can about our neighbour; it will help him more than we imagine. It is our shallow judgments and our ill-natured talk which do untold mischief to the cause of Christ. God forgive us! Nothing in the world matters so much as love; it is the one decisive proof that we are on the side of Christ. We who in this place join together for worship and common work, let us prove that we are at any rate trying to be disciples in the plainest, most practical way, in our words and acts and even in our secret thoughts. We must not expect to find everything and everybody exactly what we like or approve; the best way I know for mending matters is to pray. You learn even to love your neighbour if you pray hard for him or her. And this is eternal life. We cannot live at our best unless we live the life of brotherhood, and fulfil the claims of brotherhood, and think not of ourselves alone but of the common good, and work for it, and try to make our little corner of the world cleaner and happier and kinder for the fact of our living in it.

One thing has come out clearly, I hope, from what I have tried to say, namely, that eternal life belongs to the present as much as to the future. It is begun already; we entered the life eternal when we were

made members of Christ in baptism and joined the Christian brotherhood. We keep that life fresh and strengthen it by means of the other great sacrament, which unites us with God and with one another; and we live the life eternal, live in the highest sense, when we try with heart and soul to love God and to love our neighbour.

XVII.
INTERCESSION.

XVII.

INTERCESSION.

SUCH a gathering as this, met together in church for the purpose of intercession, and representing an organized effort of systematic prayer, is one of the most hopeful signs of the times. We are beginning to realize the power, the blessing, of regular intercession; we are learning to recognize it as one of the most powerful weapons which God has put into our hands, and one of the most important pieces of work which God has given us to do. It kindles one's imagination to know that here, in this great city,¹ pre-occupied night and day with forging the powerful and splendid instruments of our modern civilization, there is a faithful band with no less industry and skill labouring with spiritual forces for spiritual ends. It is precisely the work which the Church exists to do. In the midst of all the toil and swelter round us, it is our business to be ceaselessly praying for those who have not the leisure or opportunity to pray, and to see to it that God is not defrauded of His worship. No matter if our daily services are not attended, our business is to offer them. The daily

¹ Preached at St. Mary's Cathedral, Glasgow.

sacrifice is to rise from our altars pleading for the souls of men, reproducing upon earth, so far as we are able, the ceaseless and prevailing worship in heaven.

This organized, systematic work of intercession is founded upon the conviction that the ultimate explanation of the universe is a spiritual one; that the forces which in reality control the world are spiritual forces; and that above all there is God who rules and loves us as a Father. It is by intercession that we learn to co-operate with these spiritual forces; and God in His infinite condescension allows us to exert a real power in controlling them. This means, of course, that we set ourselves to understand and enter into the will of God, to rejoice in His rule, to believe with all our hearts in His purpose of love for all men.

And so by steady prayer, as spiritual persons, we determine that spiritual motions and forces shall have full sway in determining events.¹ This blessed work, so powerful in its effects upon others, has also a most beneficent influence upon ourselves. It enlarges our interests and takes us out of ourselves. Religious people sometimes lay themselves open to the reproach of being narrow in their interests; the ecclesiastical temper is often only another name for a limited and self-centred point of view. Let us wipe away the reproach by a large-hearted humanity and a divine concern for the souls of men, which will stir us to bring

¹ Gore, *Prayer and the Lord's Prayer*, p. 26.

their needs, their sufferings, their sins before the throne of God!

In order to refresh our minds and encourage one another in our holy work, let us take three typical specimens of intercessory prayer from Holy Scripture. We will take the first from Jeremiah xiv. and xv. They are thoroughly characteristic chapters. Jeremiah, beyond almost any other prophet, was of a warm, emotional nature, keenly alive to all that was going on around him; and with this he had a prophet's insight into the needs of his country, and all a prophet's readiness to respond to the touch of the divine hand. A grievous drought had fallen upon Judah: so that "the gates thereof languish, they are in mourning garb upon the ground, and the cry of Jerusalem is gone up." The prophet, interpreting this as a sign of Jehovah's anger, intercedes on behalf of His people. "O Thou Hope of Israel, . . . why shouldst Thou be as a mighty man that cannot save? Yet Thou Jehovah art in the midst of us, and Thy name hath been called over us; leave us not." But Jehovah replies that He will accept no intercession for the people. "Pray not for this people for their good. . . . I will not accept them; but I will consume them by the sword, and by the famine, and by the pestilence."

Again the prophet pleads in more beseeching tones, and again his intercession is rejected even more decisively than before: "Though Moses and Samuel stood before Me, yet My mind would not be toward this people. . . . I am weary of repenting. . . . I

have bereaved, I have destroyed my people, and the remnant of them will I deliver to the sword before their enemies, saith Jehovah." It is one of the most pathetic situations in the Bible. The passionate, tender-hearted prophet wrestling in prayer for his people, and his prayer not granted! Here, I think, we come upon a profound piece of teaching. We must not expect God to give physical deliverance when we pray for it. There is a higher interest at stake, a higher law which must be obeyed. The prophet prayed for Israel's deliverance, but Jehovah revealed that His holy purpose must be accomplished not by deliverance but by punishment; the supreme spiritual law required that the doom of Jerusalem should not be deferred. The same profound lesson we learn in the Garden of Gethsemane. Even to the Well-beloved the Father denied the passing of the bitter cup; He must drink it; so supreme are spiritual over physical things. We can only pray for the latter conditionally; "Father, if it be possible: not my will, but Thine be done."

Let us take our next instance of intercessory prayer from the Book of Sirach, or, to use its Latin name, *Ecclesiasticus*, the Church-book, so called because it was much used by the Church as a manual of instruction and edification. Here we find ourselves in quite a different atmosphere; we leave the region of prophecy and enter the world of religious moralizing and reflection. The son of Sirach combines the traditional Hebrew "wisdom" which we find in the

books of Job and Proverbs, with a heartfelt regard for the established forms of religion, such as the older "wise men" scarcely possessed.¹ Though he is a Hebrew of the Hebrews, yet he is no narrow Judaizer: he takes a wide survey of life; "nothing is too high nor too mean to be drawn within the circle of his reflections and admonitions." Moreover, his book was written at that momentous epoch when the religion of Israel was trying to hold its own against the advancing tide of Hellenism; and the general tone of the book, as Dean Stanley has said, is worthy of that first contact between the two great civilizations of the ancient world. There are some remarkable prayers in this book. Take the intercession in chapter xxxvi.; we may call it the prayer of the Church in the world, of the Church conscious of its isolation and weakness, and the world heathen and hostile. The writer is filled with a noble missionary spirit. "Have mercy upon us, O Lord the God of all, and behold, and send Thy fear upon all the nations. Let them see Thy mighty power, and let them know Thee, as we also have known Thee, that there is no God but only Thou, O God." At the same time the world looked to the son of Sirach as it looked to St. John, a force organized in opposition to God and God's people. So he prays that the forces of evil may be overthrown: "may they that harm Thy people find destruction." Some of this language we can hardly make our own; but we may learn

¹ Cheyne, *Job and Solomon*, p. 190.

from this devout and large-hearted Jew how to intercede for the Church's work in the world; if she is to hold her own she must herself be faithful and united. "Fill Sion; exalt Thine oracles, and fill Thy people with Thy glory." A spirit of penitence and humble waiting upon God for ourselves; and for those outside a desire for their conversion and the removal of their opposition—let such be the temper of our intercessions. And there is one more passage which we must not overlook. The Son of Sirach lived in an age of industrial activity; he watched the hind guiding the plough, the craftsman engraving signets, the potter turning the wheel, the smith at the anvil, "considering the unwrought iron: in the heat of the furnace will he wrestle with his work; the noise of the hammer will be ever in his ear." How are these busy trades and industries to become religious? How are they to attain to the true wisdom? They are too busy to become "wise," but they are necessary for the well-being of society; they "maintain the fabric of the world." They have souls made for God, what are we to tell them? "In the handywork of their craft is their prayer." It is a noble thought, full of suggestion.¹ *Laborare est orare.*

Our last illustration shall be taken from that brief but all-embracing intercession with which the Bible closes. "And the Spirit and the Bride say, Come. And he that heareth, let him say, Come. Amen. Come, Lord Jesus." Here we have intercession at

¹ Ecclus. xxxviii. 34.

its highest level. Notice the combination, the three-fold cord which cannot be broken. There is the prayer of the Spirit. St. John, like St. Paul, brings the action of the Spirit into close relation with the prayers of the Christian faithful. "The Spirit himself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered." "Through your supplication and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ"¹—it is by this that outward events are turned to our salvation. Just as the true life for the Christian means to walk in the Spirit, so true Christian prayer is prayer in the Spirit. The Spirit prays, and the Bride, the Church, the Spirit-bearing body, prays too. And the individual disciple contributes his voice to theirs; "he that heareth," he has his part in the threefold strain of intercession. "Come, Lord Jesus." The prayer is short, but it covers all that we can pray for. It is prayer to the Lord in His glory, in the unlimited fulness of His divine power, clothed with the light of heaven, anointed with oil of gladness above His fellows. Yet He is Jesus, the Son of Man, whose very name tells of infinite sympathy with the toiling and struggling sons of men, our Brother, our Master, our Example. We pray that He may come and rule our lives, and enter the dark places of this great city, and bring with Him forgiveness, new hope, and righteousness. "Thy kingdom come": may God's order prevail, God's laws be honoured, God's sovereignty be owned! "Amen: Come Lord Jesus." It is the

¹ Rom. viii. 26; Phil. i. 19.

supreme intercession ; the Spirit of God, the Church of God, each servant of God, offers it ; and it utters all we desire to pray.

“ O where thy voice doth come
Let all doubts be dumb,
Let all words be mild,
All strifes be reconciled,
All pains beguiled !
Light bring no blindness,
Love no unkindness,
Knowledge no ruin,
Fear no undoing !
From the cradle to the grave,
Save, oh ! save.”

XVIII.

THE EPIPHANY OF CHRIST.

"I (Jesus) am the root and the offspring of David, the bright, the morning star."—REV. xxii. 16.

XVIII.

THE EPIPHANY OF CHRIST.

DURING the Epiphany season the Church bids us think of the manifestation of Christ in human history. If you study them one after one you will find that the Gospels for this season have been carefully chosen to bring out certain leading features which marked His visible ministry among men, and disclosed who He was and what He came to do. It is the Church's method thus to familiarize us, in the order of the Christian year, with the main facts of the life of our Blessed Saviour. We are to become intimate with them, we are to contemplate them habitually, until, by God's grace, they make upon us an impression something like that which they made upon those who actually saw with their eyes and handled with their hands. The Epiphany thus grows clearer; the Person of Jesus Christ becomes more and more real to us; we learn to recognize Him as the true Man, the pattern and crown of Manhood, our Brother, our Master, and more, God revealing Himself in the terms of human love and self-sacrifice and goodness.

These historical facts of Christ's Epiphany are

given in the Gospels at the beginning of the New Testament; but there are other facts of Christ's Epiphany just as great and true; and these are given at the end of the New Testament, in the book of Revelation. The life which is depicted here is not less real than the life recorded in the four Gospels; it is the life of Christ, not as He was but as He is, the risen and ascended Lord. We do not read here of miracles or mighty works, but we are carried into the presence of spiritual activities more wonderful still. Here is the Epiphany, the revelation of Jesus Christ, as the Heavenly Priest ministering among the churches, as the Lamb of a perpetual and prevailing sacrifice, yet in the midst of the throne, for He is King of kings and Lord of lords, as the Bridegroom of His Church who is upholding her in the great conflict with the forces of evil. He knows all her present and her future, and He is leading her on to certain triumph.

This two-fold Epiphany of Christ as described in the Gospels and in the book of Revelation is combined in our text: "I (Jesus) am the root and offspring of David, the bright, the morning star."

"I am the root and the offspring of David." In these words Jesus speaks to us as the historic Christ, the Messiah so long expected, who entered human life in connexion with a definite human family and race in a definite part of the world.¹ The root of Jesse in time produced the branch; in His human

¹ Isa. xi. 10.

nature He was the descendant of Israel's famous king. It is of vital importance for us to keep this in mind. We think about Jesus Christ; and, guided by St. John and St. Paul, our thoughts travel wide and high, until, please God, we find that all things are by Him and in Him and unto Him; He is the Centre, as He is the Beginning and the End of all; we cannot explain the universe apart from Him. So the Church has built up her divine philosophy on the foundation of the incarnate Word, the Reason and the Utterance of Almighty God. But the Church throughout her history has found it necessary to balance her high and large philosophy by laying equal emphasis on the facts of Christ's earthly life. She clung to them in all their simple directness and put them into her Creed. We may wonder why that great evangelical title of Christ, which gives us the key to the deepest Christian truths, the title of "the Word," did not find a place in the Christian Creed. One reason probably was that the Church found it necessary to emphasize in her Creed the historical facts; it was only by appealing to the Gospel tradition that she was able to withstand the vague theories of the second century and the speculative heresies of the fourth. Age after age the tendency prevailed, and it is strong to-day, to get away from the facts of Christ's earthly life. But the Church, dearly as she values the philosophy of the Incarnation, can never afford to lose touch with Jesus of Nazareth, who lived in Galilee and Judæa and

died upon the cross. As you know, in the present day the Gospels are being examined by scholars, in a way never attempted before, to find out how far they may be accepted as historical witnesses to Christ's life on earth. We have nothing to fear from the strictest inquiry; we need not be afraid that the facts will have to go. Rather we may be unspeakably thankful for the fresh clearness and simplicity with which they stand out after their severe testing. Independently of all theories and interpretations, the Church must continually be going back to the historic Christ if she would keep true to the original Gospel. And the facts recorded in the Gospels and embodied in the Creeds, the facts which make up His Epiphany on earth—we must grow familiar with them, meditate on them, search their significance until they become living truths to us. "I am the root and the offspring of David;" so He speaks, using the language of men, revealing Himself to us in the terms of a perfect human life.

There remains the other half of the text: "I am the bright, the morning star." The beautiful symbol carries us from earth to heaven. In these words the incarnate Christ Jesus of Nazareth, who lived on earth and died upon the cross, speaks to us as the risen Lord, ever living, ever disclosing to us His light and truth. Infinitely precious as those facts of the historic Christ are, yet at the best we can only partially make the past real to ourselves; it needs to be interpreted; Christ as He is now, not only as He

was once, we must learn to know as the unseen Companion of our lives and the Lord of glory whom we worship. Long ago He came upon earth as Man; but He is always coming, always shining into our hearts, bringing life and immortality to light. This is what His Epiphany in its full sense ought to mean to us, the dawning of Christ's presence within our hearts. Let us ask Him to drive out our darkness, and to burn up the evil within us, and the ignorance, and our narrow, selfish thoughts, and to flood our souls with the light of His purity and truth. We notice both in the Gospels and in the book of Revelation that when our Lord uses symbolical language about Himself, He uses symbols such as all can understand; they are universal in their range and common to all men. The morning star is one of them: it shines for all, and all men know it and recognize it with a greeting of welcome. The light by which we live is the true light of the universe. It is not for us alone, but for all who do not acknowledge it as yet.

"The bright, the morning star." It is the star which heralds a new day, the day in which we have to serve God, and do our work, and live the life of brotherly love. "Man goeth forth to his work and to his labour until the evening:" in the strength, in the truth of Christ's Epiphany, let us set about it! In ancient times it used to be imagined that the morning star was different from the evening star; we know, of course, that the two are simply different

manifestations of the same planet. So the words of the text gain a fuller meaning. The star that shines at the day's dawn shines also at the day's close. That which has been our beacon of hope and blessing in life's day, will be with us in all its brightness at life's evening, when, in God's mercy, we pass into a state of clearer light, the light not of lamp or sun or star, but the unveiled glory of the Lord God Himself.

XIX.

THE ASCENSION OF CHRIST.

“Till we all attain . . . unto a full-grown man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.”—EPH. iv. 13.

XIX.

THE ASCENSION OF CHRIST.

IN one sense it was the end ; in a truer sense it was only the beginning. The Ascension of Christ marked indeed the end of His humiliation upon earth ; it proved that He was no longer to be confined by the restraints of a bodily life lived in the company of a small circle in a small district of the wide world : we read, therefore, about the Ascension at the end of the Gospels. At the same time it marked the dawn of a new age ; He ascended in order that He might fill all things ; accordingly we read about the Ascension at the beginning of the Acts. It is the starting-point of the history of the Church. Behind the new life of the disciples, behind the mission and expansion of the Christian society, stands the fact that the risen Christ is ascended and reigns in glory and sends His Spirit and gives gifts unto men. These gifts are of various kinds, but they have one common aim, they are all designed to produce one great result : the consummation of human life in the full-grown manhood, which is measured by nothing short of the stature of the fulness of Christ. Let us see how this works out ; it is a matter of vital importance to us.

St. Paul speaks of the fulness of Christ, that is, of something which makes up the whole Christ, something without which even Christ Himself is incomplete. We try to picture to ourselves the glory and the triumph of the Ascension; we think of the Lord assuming again the splendours of the Godhead which for a time He had deigned to veil; we think of Him entering the courts of heaven and throned among the thousand times ten thousand. Is anything wanting to complete that heavenly state? Yes, daring as the word may seem, there is. It is His brethren, His Church, ourselves! The fulness of Christ: St. Paul does not hesitate to describe it as the Church, the Body of of which He is the Head.¹ The ascended Christ is waiting to be fulfilled, until we all attain to a full-grown man; the Body and the Head together make the full Christ. The process is begun already. He has started us on our career; the new man has emerged from His creative hands; He is at work upon us fashioning, training, perfecting us for the great end, the completing of Himself. He has started us as His new creation; but there stretches before us a long period of growth before we attain our perfect manhood.

Notice that we attain it only as members of a body. There is no perfection for us apart from the perfection of the whole. All of us together, with our different opportunities and endowments, go to make up the great unity, the unity of those who believe and know

¹ Eph. i. 23.

the Son of God. "It is not good for man to be alone," stands at the very beginning of the Bible as a fundamental law of human life. We have discovered already the way in which the spirit of corporate life develops our manhood. At home, at school, and now in college, the common life is revealing each man to himself, bringing out his greatness and his littleness, his powers of sacrifice, his need of sympathy, his capacity for common service. The Church is the divine counterpart of this universal law of human life: "the individual Christian is to be what he is, and to become what he can become, by relations to the divine society,"¹ the Body of Christ. We are being trained here by the common life of college and university to play our part in the larger life, the wider scene, which awaits most of us in the future. But we shall miss the best part of our training if we are not strengthening our hold upon that great reality of our membership of the Body of Christ, the true brotherhood through which we attain to the full-grown man. Christ ascended is working in us for this end, that all of us together may arrive at the unity of the faith and knowledge of the Son of God. It is, then, as a member of the Christian society that each separate man attains to full manhood.

There is this further point. We have seen that Christ, the Creator by whom all things were made, has already created in us the new manhood; but between the new man and the full-grown man

¹ Gore, *Epistle to the Ephesians*, pp. 15, 217, etc.

there stretches a long period of slow, difficult, even painful growth. It is a truth which directly comes home to us here; for all of us, juniors and seniors alike, are busy with this very thing. We are trying to grow, to learn; we set before ourselves as an aim not merely the accumulation of knowledge, but something better, the acquiring of wisdom, which is a matter of character as much as of intellect. It is reached by the all-round development of every faculty of heart as well as of mind, of will as well as of physical health. We begin, perhaps, to catch some vision, faint it may be and far away, of what Truth means; and we would fain pursue it at all costs and with all our might. A blessed thing for us, if during our time here that vision rises before our minds! "After it, follow it, Follow the Gleam."

For all of us, then, this is the time of growth, of opening vision, of kindling hope, of eager purpose. And to us just now comes the message of the ascended Lord, giving us the true aim and direction. The perfect manhood, the consummation of human life, is that which is growing into the stature of Christ, which will in the end contribute to the fulness of Christ. This is no vague dream or strain of religious rhetoric; it is the most vital, the most practical of truths to live by. The Ascension of Christ is the primary fact of Christian history and Christian experience. He lives and reigns and sends His Spirit; so that, through His Church and Sacraments, the record of His earthly life, of the Cross and Passion, becomes no mere record

of the past, but a living force in the present, a guide and pattern for us, showing us how we must follow, how we must grow. He lives and sends us His Spirit and His manifold gifts, in order that by entering the corporate life of His Body we may develop those powers which can be developed in no other way, and may thus attain to the full-grown manhood, together with our brethren in the great unity of those who believe and know; and then Christ will be fulfilled, the Body and the Head together making up the one Christ, the Christ that is to be.

XX.

THE SERVANT OF THE LORD.

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THE SERVANT OF THE LORD.

NOTHING short of the fall of Jerusalem and the overthrow of the sanctuary in 586 B.C. could have saved Israel's religion. It seemed a cruel paradox at the time, but these disasters led to a breaking down of ancient limitations, an opening out of wider and deeper views, which were vital to the preservation of the faith. Through the discipline of exile Israel came to recognize that Jahveh was more than a local deity, and that a personal sense of the relation of each individual to God must take the place of the traditional habit which regarded religion chiefly as a social bond. Such lessons were only to be learnt in the school of suffering. Humanly speaking, the destiny of the faith which has influenced the world lay with the little band of Jewish exiles in Babylonia, and upon their loyalty everything depended. No doubt there were failures, but the painful schooling had not been in vain, for when a prophet appeared after some fifty years of exile had passed, about the time when Cyrus was advancing upon Babylon, faithful hearts were found ready to respond to his teaching. The great unknown author of Isaiah xl.—lv.

was the inspired interpreter of the new epoch upon which Israel was about to enter. He at once took up the problem which weighed heaviest upon the exiles: why had Israel been allowed to suffer such unparalleled misfortunes? Jeremiah and Ezekiel had found the explanation in Israel's sins, Second Isaiah takes a more hopeful view. Jahveh does not overlook the guilt of the past; at the same time He allows that the punishment has been enough, and more than enough; Jerusalem has received double for all her sins. So the prophet begins with a message of consolation. A new exodus is to mark the opening of a new career; released from Babylon, Israel is to be free to take up its appointed task.¹ That task has a direct concern with the heathen. In contrast to Ezekiel, who regarded the heathen as the objects of Jahveh's wrath, Second Isaiah treats them as the objects of Jahveh's mercy. The restoration of Israel is to be an ensign to the nations, a striking exhibition of God's purpose for their salvation, which they will acknowledge with obedient homage.² The prophet crowns this teaching by a lofty exposition of the nature of Jahveh. He states, as it had not been stated, however it may have been felt before, the uniqueness and supremacy of Israel's God. In glowing phrase, with passionate argument, he proves dramatically the sole Godhead of Jahveh. The

¹ Isa. xl. 1 ff., xlviii. 20, xlix. 15, xliii. 25, xliv. 3, li. 22, liv. 9, 10.

² Ezek. xxvi.-xxxii., xxxviii., xxxix.; Isa. xlv. 14, 22 f., xlix. 22 f.

nations put forward the claims of their deities only to have the fatuity of them exposed. The conclusion is irresistible: "I Jahveh am the first and I am the last, and beside me there is no God."¹ The creed of monotheism, the foundation of true religion for all the world, is now proclaimed with unmistakable clearness.

Thus a new light was cast upon many problems. Israel had suffered, but there was an excess in those sufferings which could not be explained as a punishment for national sins; further, the belief in one God supreme in heaven and earth, now distinctly formulated, laid upon Israel a new responsibility towards the heathen. *Morientes vivimus!* the prophet had grasped the clue to Israel's future. Abasement and defeat were to be the starting-point for fresh spiritual conquests; Israel was to emerge from captivity to become one of the moving forces in the world's history. These high hopes and convictions the prophet embodies in his conception of the servant of the Lord.

The title as applied to Israel was not a new one—it had been used both by Jeremiah and by Ezekiel;² in Second Isaiah, however, it receives a prominence not found before. Again and again Jahveh addresses His words to "Israel My servant," "Jacob My servant."³ But there is a group of four passages in which the title occurs in a marked

¹ Isa. xl. 12-26, xli. 1-4, 21-29, xliii. 8-13, xliv. 6-20.

² Jer. xxx. 10; Ezek. xxxvii. 25.

³ Isa. xlv. 1, xlv. 4, xlviii. 20, etc.

and significant connection: xlii. 1-4, xlix. 1-6, l. 4-9, lii. 13-liii. 12. In the first, Jahveh introduces His Servant; in the second, the Servant soliloquizes; in the third, though the name is not used, it is the Servant who is speaking; in the fourth, others describe the character and history of the Servant. We notice at once how these passages stand out from the rest of the prophecy. The context in no case leads up to them; the Servant appears abruptly upon the scene, twice with words upon his lips. And in form these passages are quite distinct from their surroundings; even in a translation we are conscious of passing from the flowing periods of rhetoric to the balanced rhythm of poetry. These songs, as we may call them, have been much discussed in the last few years, and different views of them have received powerful support. It has been maintained, for example, that they are not the compositions of Second Isaiah himself, but insertions from some other source. It is true that they stand out with marked distinctness from their context, but it is equally true that the ideas which they express, the character and functions ascribed to the Servant, harmonize thoroughly with the teaching of the author of Isaiah xl.-lv. He may have composed them separately and incorporated them later into his writing—that is a subordinate point; but the more they are studied the stronger grows the impression that they belong to the warp and woof of his thought. Granted, therefore, that the songs are the work of Second Isaiah, who is

meant by the Servant? What do the songs themselves tell us? We learn that the Servant has been specially chosen. His function is prophetic, to proclaim the true religion ("judgment") to the nations; and though externally his methods are unimpressive, though he has had to endure failure, persecution, wounds, yet the issue is secure in Jahveh's hands. Crushed and oppressed, he is even done to death, but he is to be raised from the dead, and this recovery, so unexpected and extraordinary, is to startle the nations into wonder and perception of the true meaning of his sufferings. The description seems to go beyond what is applicable to any individual. We cannot imagine a single Jewish sufferer producing the effect upon many nations and kings which is described in lii. 15; accordingly we are not surprised to find that in one passage (xlix. 3) the Servant is identified with Israel. Now, as we have noticed, outside the songs the prophet frequently uses the expressions, "Israel My servant," "Jacob My servant," and it is obvious that "Israel" and "Jacob" mean what they mean elsewhere, the actual nation addressed collectively. It is natural, therefore, to conclude that the Servant in the four songs is Israel too, and Israel in the same sense; not an individual such as Jeremiah or Jehoiachin or Zerubbabel, not the pious kernel of the nation, not the ideal as distinguished from the actual Israel, but Israel itself, the historical nation, Israel as it is according to the divine intention, endowed with its God-given functions,

its sufferings explained, its restoration assured, free at last to take up its appointed mission. The Servant is Israel.

There are some obvious difficulties in the way of this interpretation. According to xlix. 5, 6 in the English versions, the Servant is to restore Israel to its own land, and, as if this were too light a task, the grander mission to the Gentiles is superadded. Elsewhere, however, in these prophecies Jahveh Himself is the Saviour, the Goël of Israel. The servant is nowhere regarded as the instrument of the restoration. Hence xlix. 5 is to be translated, "Jahveh that formed me from the womb to be His servant, to restore Jacob to Himself, and to gather Israel to Himself." In the verse following, the Hebrew is awkward and overloaded. Literally it runs, "And He said, Too slight a thing for thy being My servant is it to raise up," etc. The meaning may be either "[for me] to raise up" or "[for thee] to raise up." The general teaching of these prophecies leaves no doubt as to which of the alternatives is the right one. And we are justified in questioning the accuracy of the text. "For thy being My servant" looks very much like an explanatory gloss crept in from the margin. Omit these words, and we obtain a consistent and straightforward sense, "It is too slight a thing for Me to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore," etc.; "so I will appoint thee a light to the Gentiles."

Another objection which naturally may be felt is

this—Was actual Israel worthy to receive this exalted character? We can imagine some saintly individual, or the faithful few, answering to the description, but hardly the nation itself of which Jeremiah and Ezekiel, for example, have such hard things to say. Our prophet does not shut his eyes to realities. He admits that the Servant is blind and deaf, but from the first he is hopeful and encouraging. His object is to rouse Israel to regard itself as God regards it, and to impress upon the nation a sense of its high calling. We find a suggestive parallel to this in the New Testament, especially in the Apocalypse. Rightly interpreted, the visions refer not to the future, but to the present, to the Church as she is at all periods of her history. She contains indeed unworthy and unfaithful members (Rev. ii. iii., etc.), but all the time she is the New Jerusalem, the Bride, the Wife of the Lamb (Rev. xxi.; cf. Heb. xii. 22 f.; Phil. iii. 20; Col. iii. 1–3, etc.).

One further objection may be considered. Western habits of thought may well find it hard to imagine that the hero of l. 4–9 and lii. 13–liii. 12 is a nation and not an individual. The whole description brings so vividly before the mind an actual person, a martyr, speaking, stricken, bending beneath the violence of the storm. What a testimony to the genius of the poet who has created this pathetic figure! Yet in thus personifying the nation of Israel he was but writing in the vivid idiom congenial to Hebrew poets and prophets. Instances of the same kind abound in

many parts of the Old Testament.¹ An exact parallel to l. 6 may be seen in Psalm cxxix. 3.

Bearing in mind the principle of interpretation adopted above, we approach the most profoundly significant of the four songs, lii. 13—liii. 12. The question at once meets us, Who are the speakers in chapter liii.? They are not the rest of the nation describing the character and history of an individual martyr or of the faithful few. We may dismiss, as an artificiality, the notion that actual Israel is here speaking of ideal Israel. Since, then, the speakers are not Israelites, they must be none other than the heathen. Startled and amazed by the extent of Israel's sufferings and by a recovery not less wonderful, a resurrection as it seemed from a dishonoured death, the heathen, with this unique career enacted before their eyes, at last perceive the unimagined and far-reaching truth. "Who can believe that which we have heard?" They admit that they had been wholly in the wrong; they plead that there was nothing outwardly that promised such an issue, everything, rather, to encourage their indifference and contempt. In the light of Israel's restoration they can now see a purpose in those sufferings. Compared with themselves, Israel was innocent; yet the extremity, the excess of suffering was borne by Israel. Only one explanation was possible—the innocent had suffered that the guilty might escape; Israel had

¹ See Driver, *Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament*, ed. 8, p. 390.

suffered vicariously for the heathen! "He was wounded for our transgressions, bruised for our iniquities: on him fell the chastisement that brought us peace, and by his wound our healing came. . . . Jahveh has caused to light upon him the iniquity of us all."

There is nothing like this elsewhere in the Bible. It takes us into a region which no other prophet has entered, into the heart of the heathen world at the crucial moment when the divine scheme of universal redemption is producing its first effects. The heathen confess their errors; they respond to the missionary appeal; they own the value of the martyr's sufferings. That a Hebrew prophet should have conceived of such a thing proves how wonderfully Israel's religion had been widened and deepened by the discipline of the Exile. The nearest approach to this conception is to be found in the Book of Jonah, whose author is the only other prophet who comes near to Second Isaiah in breadth of view (see Jonah iii. 7-10). Perhaps we may place at the same level one other, and a later, word of prophecy. In contrast to Israel's dishonourable service, see, cries "Malachi," what the heathen are doing; "from the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same My name is great among the Gentiles, and in every place incense is offered unto My name, and a pure offering; for My name is great among the Gentiles, saith the Lord of hosts" (Mal. i. 11, R.V.).¹

¹ For a different view of this passage see Lagrange, *Revue Biblique*, Jan. 1906, pp. 79 ff.

We may claim for the above interpretation that it gives a natural and consistent meaning to the loftiest of Old Testament prophecies. The truth which Second Isaiah was inspired to teach is enshrined in an imaginative representation of the people whom God had chosen for a special task. One side of that task was in process of being fulfilled by Israel's sufferings and restoration; the other was to be carried out by making known the true religion of the one God.

The text of lii. 13—liii. 12 is uncertain and obscure in many places. Without going into details, two or three probable emendations must be mentioned as necessary for the right understanding of the poem. In liii. 13, for "shall deal wisely," read "Israel," a slight change which greatly improves the sense and balance of the verse (Budde, followed by Marti and Peake); in liii. 8, instead of "for the transgression of my people was he stricken," read "for our transgressions he was stricken to death" (the last word from the LXX.); a glance at the Hebrew text of liii. 10, 11 will show that these verses are chiefly composed of doublets, representing early attempts at emendation. How the text originally ran we cannot be sure, but the drift of it was probably "Jahveh showed favour to his servant, and delivered his soul from trouble, caused him to see light (LXX.) and be satisfied, even a seed which shall prolong its days."

Interpreting the four songs in this manner, what are we to say about their fulfilment? We cannot do better than follow the lines which Professor Peake

has indicated in his admirable study on this subject.¹ The qualities which existed in Israel were never really adequate to the accomplishment of its lofty mission. But these qualities, imperfectly realized in Israel, were fully embodied in Jesus of Nazareth, who concentrates in Himself the essential Israel. No nation can reveal God in any adequate sense; no nation can be said to suffer vicariously in actual fact for the world's sins. But the principle involved in the prophet's teaching is capable of a wide application. God alone can adequately reveal God; and the Revealer came through Israel. One who is the Representative Man did, we believe, suffer for the sins of the world; and the Sufferer came through Israel. The greatest of the prophecies has been fulfilled, and in a manner beyond the prophet's dream, by our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

¹ *The Problem of Suffering in the Old Testament*, 1904, pp. 65 ff.

XXI.

THE CROWN OF REVELATION.

“And Philip said, If thou believest with all thy heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.”—Acts viii. 37.

XXI.

THE CROWN OF REVELATION.

THIS verse, you remember, occurs in the narrative which describes how the Ethiopian eunuch became a Christian. But there is good reason to believe that the verse does not belong to the narrative in its original form. With one exception all the best MSS. omit it; accordingly the Revised Version omits it too, and prints the words in the margin. How, then, did our text find its way into this passage of the Acts? Of course we can only guess, but I think we can guess with much probability. For look at the verse before: the Ethiopian says, "Behold, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized?" "And he commanded the chariot to stand still; and they both went down into the water." So the passage runs in the Revised Version. The eunuch asked a question, but received no answer. How natural, then, that an early Christian reader should insert an answer in his copy of the New Testament! And what else should the answer be, but the short creed or profession of faith which every Christian had to repeat when he was baptized? "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." The verse

must have found its way into the narrative at a very early date, for already in the second century after Christ it is quoted as Scripture.

Now here I think we may see something that is most instructive. In this verse which I have taken for the text we have not the words of St. Luke, the author of the Acts, but the voice of the early Church speaking to us, and declaring what is the creed of the Christian. A man wants to become a Christian. Very well, says the early Church, you must be baptized; but before you can enter the Christian society you must make a profession of faith. You must be instructed in the truth and believe it with all your heart; and you must repeat the words which contain the very essence of the Christian faith: "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God."

Our text, then, may not be an original part of the New Testament, but what a precious piece of evidence it is, showing us so unexpectedly, so emphatically, what was the belief and practice of the Christian Church in the earliest days!

Let us turn for a moment to the narrative in Acts. It tells us how a man made the great discovery and found Christ; the stages by which he arrived at the full truth are worth noticing. To begin with, he was a foreigner, a Gentile, an Ethiopian of high rank at the court of Queen Candace. But, though a foreigner, he had been attracted to the Jewish religion; he must have placed himself under instruc-

tion, and then have been admitted as a Jewish proselyte. He professed and made his own the belief in the one true God, the God of Israel. He must have been heartily in earnest about his adopted religion, for he had travelled all the way from Africa to attend a festival at Jerusalem. He had gone in the spirit of a pilgrim seeking light; and it is evident that he had been stirred and impressed by his experiences in the Holy City. His heart was opened, and he wanted to know more; so, as he rode in his chariot on the way home he read aloud the prophet Isaiah. He had reached a point in his reading where he was brought to a stop. He could not follow the prophet's meaning. The fifty-third chapter seemed to lead to a deeper truth than anything he had learnt as yet. Who was this sufferer for the sins of others? At that moment God's providence brought Philip to his side, and he preached unto him Jesus. And now all became clear. Here was the fulfilment. Here inquiring faith passed into light; the crowning revelation had arrived; the Ethiopian found Christ! With overflowing heart he professed his belief in the divine Sonship of Jesus the prophet of Nazareth, who died and rose again; and in that faith he was baptized. You notice, stage by stage, the progress of his religious experience. From heathenism he was converted to the belief in one God; then came inquiry into the deeper meaning of the Jewish religion, a search for something which he had not found in

it; then came the discovery of the whole truth, flooding his soul as with the light of a new day. His deepest desire was satisfied; he found his Saviour.

In the present day we are much more interested than our fathers were in the study of religions, ancient and modern; we are learning to appreciate them in a new way; and one of the most striking results of this study is the discovery that even in remote ages, even among the heathen (as we call them), men were longing and looking for the arrival of a Saviour, a divine Deliverer. We find clear evidence for this hope in the religions of Egypt and Babylonia. We are coming to see that from the earliest times, and among the most various races, men instinctively felt the need of some divine act of deliverance. Nowhere perhaps does this ancient, universal longing of the human heart find such profound expression as in Isaiah liii. Who is this innocent sufferer for the sins of others? Where is he who stooped so low as to place himself on the side of human weakness and loss, and then was glorified after suffering? Tell me who he is, and my deepest longings will be satisfied. Of whom speaketh the prophet this? "And Philip opened his mouth, and beginning from this Scripture preached unto him Jesus."

Thus we learn that to stop short of the belief that Jesus is the Son of God is to miss the end of true religious progress. The earlier stages of God's revelation to men were leading up to this as the

crown and climax. And the belief in Jesus as the Son of God has been handed down to us unimpaired; it is the acceptance of it which qualifies us for baptism, admits us into the Christian society, and makes us Christians.

This vital truth I feel sure we need to grasp with much more firmness than many of us do. For it is being attacked and denied in a very subtle way. All down the ages it has been questioned, and in our own day even good and learned men are treating it in a manner which falls short of the Church's standard. For example, we are told that what Christ is, all of us are capable of becoming; the divine nature is in all of us; "God manifest in the flesh" is not to be restricted to Jesus alone; Christ is God, but then all men are God; and there is no unique sense in which Jesus Christ is the Son of God. A great deal of modern teaching professes this kind of belief. Whatever elements of truth it may contain, clearly this teaching is not Christian in the full sense, nor scriptural, if Scripture be fairly interpreted; and it goes along with a very imperfect idea of the fact of sin and of man's need of a Saviour. So we must be on our guard, and strengthen our hold on the central truth of our creed in all its simplicity and fulness. We must meditate upon it with care and patient study. Few people really study the Gospels with much thoroughness; and though we may not be called to be students in the technical sense, all of us can take

pains and humbly seek to learn. Just now it is the Gospels which are attracting the keenest interest. Dr. Sanday has lately published a book in which he reviews the situation with all a scholar's fairness¹; and while he lends the weight of his authority to an ample appreciation of the work accomplished by recent criticism, he carefully points out the difference between the "reduced Christianity" which is being taught in many quarters and the "full Christianity" which the Church upholds. Of course we have to learn how to interpret the ancient truth handed down to us: and, thank God, we find that it is capable of being adapted to the intellectual and spiritual needs of our modern day. But let us not shut our eyes to the gravity of the issue between the full belief in the Divinity of Christ and the various forms of disbelief in it.

To stop short at anything less than the full Christian belief is to miss the crowning revelation. God has been revealing Himself and educating the race through the long ages; and the education is intended to lead us, as it led the Ethiopian eunuch, up to Jesus Christ, and to find in Him the fulfilment of all human longings and hopes, the satisfaction of our deepest needs, the Saviour and Deliverer of sinful men.

¹ *Christologies Ancient and Modern*, 1910.

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